

Black Flag

FOR ANARCHIST

RESISTANCE



our resistance



is as global



as capitalism

Black Flag



For a social system based on mutual aid and voluntary co-operation; against state control and all forms of government and economic repression. To establish a share in the general prosperity for all – the breaking down of racial, religious, national and sex barriers – and to fight for the life of one world.

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editorial

Welcome to issue 224 of **Black Flag**. You will find the usual mix of articles, interviews and reviews. Whether it is on the Zapatista's or the Miner's strike, we hope you will find something of interest. We also have interviews with anarchists from Argentina, Ireland and South Africa. May Day saw our Irish comrades at the end of a particularly mad anti-anarchist media onslaught. We found out what they had been up to. We have also included a lengthy interview with comrades from South Africa, people who don't get much coverage in the Western anarchist press. We also have a longer than usual reviews section, the bulk of which is a review and critique of the Scottish Socialist Party's libertarian-sounding social democratic ideas.

Now the bad news. This is (possibly?/probably?) the last one for a while. This is not due to lack of people interested in buying it. Far from it. The magazine is still as popular as it used to be. The sad fact is that unless more people get involved this issue of **Black Flag** will be the last. This should come as no surprise. The last few issues have asked people to get involved, with no avail. We had hoped that seeing these appeals for help and the fact that our plans to go back to quarterly have not materialised would have made some people think about helping out but no volunteers have come forward.

Obviously, we don't want to do this as we all think that **Black Flag** is a good resource for the movement. However, if we are simply producing another commodity which is passively consumed by others then it seems pointless. Particularly as the members of the collective have pressing personal commitments which make it difficult to give the magazine the time it deserves, especially if we want it to be more than annual as it is now.

So here is the situation. Unless you get involved then it simply will not happen. An anarchist magazine can survive only if the wider movement takes an active interest in it. The movement in the UK is not as healthy as in some countries, but surely it is big and active enough to support a magazine like **Black Flag**? Now that **Freedom** has become an anarchist paper again, it would make sense to complement it with a quarterly magazine which contains longer, more in depth, articles and analysis that **Freedom** cannot handle.

So it makes sense to keep **Black Flag** going. It can potentially be a resource which can be used by anarchists to discuss ideas and issues in more depth and it has a reputation for quality that many other anarchists journals envy. That a quarterly magazine which complements a fortnightly newspaper would be a massive boost to the British anarchist movement goes without saying. It would show a serious movement aiming to change the world rather than just moaning about it in the pub.

If this appeals, what can you do to help? We are looking for people who can commit to handling distribution, finances, editing, replying to mail, and/or writing. So as well as producing copy we need people to help with the administrative side of the magazine. As far as writing goes, we don't need essays or long articles (although these are always welcome, they can be daunting for new writers). We need reports on demos, actions and events as well as reviews of books, cds, DVDs and so on. Currently, the editorial meetings are geographically based in and around London. However, if you have email you can get involved. If you want to help, we will find a way to include you.

Will **Black Flag** continue? Ultimately, it is up to you.

Contents

Features

A Year of our lives.....	3
Zapatistas put	
Autonomy into practice.....	8
An Interview with	
a piquetera.....	10
May Day in Dublin.....	12
Spirit of Rebellion.....	15
Sucking the Golden Egg.....	16
Anarchy in Southern Africa...	20
Anarchism and Community	
Politics.....	30

Reviews

Anarchist Classic:	
What is Anarchism?.....	32
May Day and Anarchism.....	32
How we shall bring about	
the revolution.....	33
One Step Forward, Two	
Steps Back: Imagine.....	34
"How Revolutions	
must not be made"--	
and the alternative: "My	
Disillusionment in Russia"	
and "Anarchism".....	39/40

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A Year Of Our Lives

20 years since the great coal strike of 1984/85

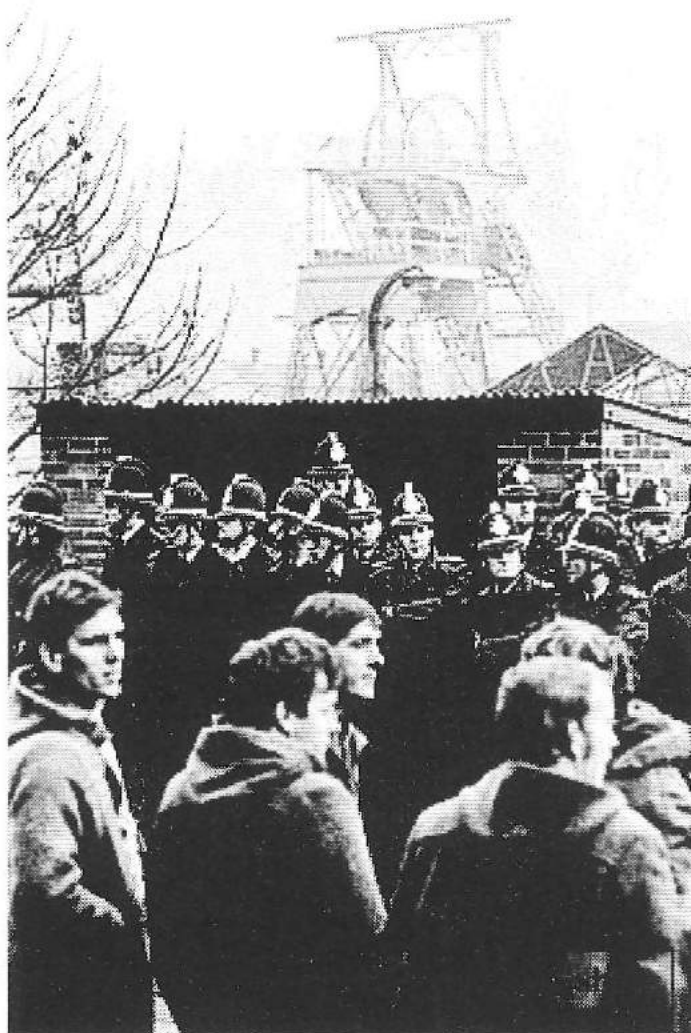
David Douglass

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the 1984/85 miners strike, arguably the most important working class struggle of the twentieth century. Some have seen the miners strike of 1926 and the subsequent general strike as a greater potential revolutionary movement. I wouldn't argue with that, for a brief period the state and the misleaders of the Trade Union movement held their breath, while the tanks were mobilised on the streets and the military took up position while workers followed the call for class solidarity. But the moment was short lived, in its revolutionary potential anyway, for the miners it was to last 9 bitter, betrayal and starvation filled months.

The 84/85 movement, however, posed a far greater physical challenge to the Guardians of law and order, in terms of confrontation and mass movement of workers taking to the streets to challenge control by the state. In terms of rank and file control (at least initially) and involvement of the whole community, the offensive by the women of the coalfields and sometimes the children, establishment of miners support groups across industry and the labour movement, the world wide mobilisation of solidarity support and sometimes action, 84 was far more an actual movement, politicising vast numbers of people, both within and without the pit communities. (Of course 26 had its moments, derailing the Flying Scotsman, was unmatched by anything we pulled off in 84 for example).

The pit communities were 'closed' communities in the sense that, mining isn't a trade you just come to out of the blue. It is a profession passed on father to son, in many cases for generations

miners spoke on public platforms during the strike, of 'the struggle of our fathers and grandfathers' most academics assumed they were talking figuratively, but they



(women and little girls had worked in some coalfields, but by the 1840s were prevented by legislation from underground labour, pit brow women continued into the 1960s). It carries with it, its own culture, its own view of history and how that has impacted upon the mining communities. When

weren't, they were talking actually, about the impact and perceptions of struggles which had gone before. The effect of this, was to ensure mining communities were already highly politicised, with deep class perspectives and socialist traditions. It had been scarce ten years earlier the Heath government

broke its back on the miners strike, and twelve years since they had wrecked his incomes policy. So the miners and their families entered this struggle well aware of the scale of the challenge being mounted. Although some had taken some convincing at first, by March 84 few were unaware that Thatcher was moving in to smash the social power of the miners by breaking their union in an all or nothing confrontation.

Almost universally the 'left' has cited the decentralised nature of the NUM as a weakness. This is a strange view indeed, without the semi-autonomy of the miners areas, the strike in the form it was launched could never have happened. Behind the view is a notion that some how the miners could simply be ordered out on strike by a national leadership running a national union. They would never have worn that, which is in part why the old Area structure and strong branch autonomies remained.

Ever since Thatcher was elected it was clear her whole strategy at home would depend on being able to heavily defeat the unions. Most had responded to this perspective by staying out of sight and hoping she wouldn't notice them, with the miners she and her party strategists had long planned to take them on as a prelude to her whole social and economic programme; the miners had to be fought and defeated (most will perhaps

be aware of the Myron Plan and Ridley Commission, strategies drawn up following the defeat of Heath to take on and defeat the miners in the future, using scab drivers, mass policing, an anti strike movement and support for a nuclear alternative). A steady game of chess had been stalking the board for three years prior to the outbreak of the strike. The union leadership had been trying to forge a strategy which would take the miners as a united national body into conflict with this government, on our terms, but it had failed. Failed because although the miners were a militant bunch, and would fight on wages and conditions when they felt particularly aggrieved, they had never really been too arsed about fighting pit closures. Hundreds had closed over the preceding twenty years, the failure to fight this was only partially due to the collaboration of NUM

leaders, the other was down to the ambivalent attitude of the miners to pit work.

We didn't actually like the pit, we didn't actually like working on god awful shifts, in crippling dust and heat in cramped and wet conditions. True we were all

proud to be miners, but that didn't mean we liked working down the mine! So fighting for jobs, especially *these jobs*

was never going to be a catchy slogan. Arthur had disastrously tried to link the question of pit closures to pay rises together on a single ballot paper, in the hope that the desire for the latter would deliver up a mandate on the former. The members were furious and felt they were being conned, and the strategy backfired. The NCB for its part was also wrong footed, for a start they were not sure what the aim of a showdown was about. Most senior managers would agree the union was too strong and needed its wings clipping in a showdown, many would agree there was *surplus capacity* in the industry and it required fine tuning, perhaps a little surgery. Few on the NCB side would agree to any perspective of decimating the industry or stomping the union out of existence, the bulk of them had come up through the ranks, and themselves were

that this whole strategy was aimed at destroying the NCB as an organisation, and with it, most of them. For a time it looked as though, the NCB would concentrate on taking out 'capacity' (shutting pits) in areas where they figured they could get away with it, Durham, Northumberland, Scotland, Wales. Rank and file efforts to generate a major fight back on closures in these areas failed to move, with great residual bitterness. Polmaise in Scotland, Bear Park in Durham, Lewis Merthyr in South Wales all had tried to demonstrate the need for solidarity action and a national stand. At Lewis Merthyr pickets had started to be deployed around the country. At Hatfield Main in Doncaster the Women's Support Group was founded to lobby for support for strike action for Lewis Merthyr and the branch voted to strike. The Doncaster panel was calling

en-mass and the strike was endorsed under rule 41 by the National Executive Committee, the way was open for South Wales to then picket out and call for support from the other areas. However the demand for a national ballot was acceded to and following the usual press propaganda war, warning of hell fire, and murder, the vote was lost by 61%. The NCB could continue its selective surgery without confrontation.

That was not the strategy however, and under Thatcher's orders, MacGreggor was called in because Thatcher didn't trust the NCB chiefs to do the scale of closure and conduct the fight to the finish with the NUM. The US imported undertaker threw down the gauntlet in Yorkshire, Cortonwood would close in days, what are you going to do about it? The Yorkshire miners as a

whole had been very reluctant to fight for miners elsewhere, it must be said, but now the challenge was at home, and it was clear this was a fight, initially yes for 50,000 jobs and 50 pits, but also whether or not the remaining



generational pit folk, albeit 'on the other side'.

What the bosses of the Coal Board hadn't realised was

for strikes in the entire Doncaster coalfield in support, but other parts of Yorkshire were hostile. The South Wales Area came out

miners would have any backbone, what sort of regime would remain for the survivors and would we

have a union at all. Those things *were* worth fighting for. Again an area strike was called by pit delegates and at mass meetings throughout the coalfields endorsed at the pit head in a show of tens of thousands of hands, although there had also been

a successful ballot in the Yorkshire Area three years earlier. Again the NEC approved the action under rule 41 and the Yorkshire pickets set off to call out their fellow miners in all the other areas. This time we would not respond to calls for a national ballot. Other

areas joined the action, some very reluctantly and picketing and mass meetings seen strong arguments, especially in Wales were the miners had felt

particularly let down by Yorkshire, but within a week 80% of the miners and 134 pits were on strike nationwide. At the others despite calls to support the strike, and with the active assistance of Thatcher's strike breaking teams and undercover agents, an anti-strike movement later an anti-union movement was developed.

What must be remembered is that this uneven response by key areas was not an accident, it had been designed to happen, and

designed by the former Labour government.

The miners strike of 74 had brought down the Tories and imposed a labour government, but the miners had refused to call off their strike during and after the

pay bargaining. It meant that miners wages and conditions for the first time were debated on a single national table by a single national union body representing all the areas. It had ended area disparities and area inequalities. National pay

break. This it did by introduction of the Area Incentive Schemes, over the top of national conference decisions and against the decisions of national ballots. The Midlands and Nottingham in particular ignored ballot decisions and

with the green light from Gormley, effectively a fifth columnist, the area incentive scheme was adopted, entirely *unconstitutionally*. Wages and conditions, as well as perspectives for the future, would now be locally coloured



general election. The implication was clear to any

bargaining had meant for the

to a large extent. Area

Sexual stereotyping, attitudes to gays, religious groups, everything which had been taken for granted was now no longer taken for granted.

strategies would be seen as more important than national ones. Old fault lines, first established in

government, strike action could shift governments, and it needn't be once every five years. Power resided elsewhere other than in parliament. The working class as a class had power if it wished to exercise it for political and class ends. Labour didn't like this any more than the Tories and had set up a think tank to design strategies to ensure this didn't happen again, just as the Tories had done in fact. Chief target of the strategists had been the centralising, unifying, feature of national

first time that a miner in the Scotland could be paid the same rates for the same class of work as a miner in Kent, or in any one of the far flung coalfield areas.

The eyes of the miners in all areas, and the strength of their resolve would be unified in one union around conference decisions. It had been this feature, brought about by the National Power Loading Agreement of 63 which had cleared the way for successful strikes in 69, 72 and 74. It was this feature which Labour now moved to

the anti 1926 strike movement, the anti miners union of Spensorism which had been established in Nottingham, now opened up wider with the generous payments of incentives in selective areas. Nottingham and Leicester convinced themselves they had a long term future of their own, the other coalfields areas were not of concern. This "I'm all right Jack" attitude was crucial in dividing miner from miner and area from area, but it had been created as a political and social ploy, it wasn't some natural

development.

Some have made the ballot the central issue of the strike. Of course it wasn't, but it is important to understand the degree to which the rank and file dictated tactics during this strike. Many in the leadership had seen the picketing operations and the semi-official nature of the strike movement as a temporary measure, a kick-start to get the thing rolling on a more official basis. Once the strike started, and the full design of the other side revealed, once we were able to let the activists hammer home the message of the gravity of this situation, once the bulk of the rank and file were fully convinced of the necessity to take this on, we could then call a national ballot. Wrong, although a special conference was convened in Sheffield, and a rule change had gone through conference to change the rule requirement for national action from 55% to 51%. The members now on strike could see no need for any ballots. They thought we in the leadership of the union were trying to sell them out, were looking for an excuse to call off the strike. So they instructed their delegates at pit after pit to vote against a national ballot and to continue the strike to victory. It was an entirely understandable reaction, but in retrospect a mistaken one. A national ballot at this stage of the struggle, with emotions running high and the bulk of the collieries at a standstill would without any doubt whatever have won a massive strike mandate. Of course this wouldn't have stopped the hardened scabs going in, nor stopped the reactionary forces operating

MINING COMMUNITIES ADVICE CENTRE

STAINFORTH, DONCASTER

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Operating From St John's Hall., Emerson Ave. Stainforth.

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We assist all industrial workers not simply miners with common law claims against current and former employers for industrial injuries, diseases and employment rights.

The Office assists all fellow workers living in the current and former mining communities not simply miners and their families.

The Mining Communities Advice Centre, supports the struggle for a world without wage slavery and capitalism. For a world owned and controlled by the working class itself. We are proud to be associated with both the NUM and the IWW and support both organisations, in their struggles for justice for miners and the pit communities.

**THE MINING COMMUNITY ADVICE CENTRE HAS NO FUNDING
AND OPERATES PURELY ON VOLUNTARY DONATIONS.**

in Nottingham trying to break the union and the strike, but it would have robbed them of their legitimacy, and taken some of the edge off the excuses put forward by other unions showing only lukewarm

Nottingham miners where only a minority, perhaps a third actually actively supported the strike, men refused to cross picket lines and were, if not happy to go home, at least went home without too much fuss.

getting through, and to break up picket lines. The police were signed up as the NCB's own security firm to ensure scabs got to work on time and in one piece regardless of numbers and costs. Roadblocks, and curfews

were imposed and the striking villages were saturated with an occupying

***Victory was within grasp, we could feel it and taste it.
Thatcher and MacGreggor have both admitted as much.***

support or outright scabbing.

For a time, the pickets spreading out in brilliant manoeuvres from coalfield to coalfield and pit to pit, rolled all in front of them, the sheer buoyancy of confidence of the pickets won over by far and away the bulk of doubters in coalfield after coalfield. Even in

Solidarity started to come through strongly on the railways, and among the seafarers. Some power stations started to realise that our jobs were literally their jobs too and took blacking actions. Thatcher's reaction was the drafting of a de-facto national police force, which would be given its head to do anything it had to stop the pickets

police force. Government strategies were then based around getting at least one scab into every pit in Britain. In Yorkshire, this would be the major diversion, along with the Orgreave plant. These police second fronts would stop the pickets in Nottingham and allow the scabs to work and coal to be produced. The bitterness of escalating violence and

counter-violence is now legendary, but what it did was open up political ideas on class violence, on counter violence, and the justification for armed struggles. The IRA, for example, only lost sympathy during the strike when they failed to kill Thatcher and her cabinet. The scab herding taxi drivers death in Wales was seen and justified almost everywhere as a legitimate action which had simply gone wrong, a causality in a war which had already claimed two of our pickets without any such fuss in the press. The hypocrisy over Libyan financial assistance for the strikers, when Thatcher was pouring extra oil in from every despotic country in the world, all were educations in the real class divide in world events.

Across the world, working people mobilised in solidarity with the British miners and their families. The scale of the operation is breathless. Tens of millions of pounds were raised and distributed through rank and file networks of women, and local support groups. Families fed, clothed and cared for 12 bitter months of struggle. Sympathetic councils suspended rents, kept school canteens open during holiday months, and did what they could, whilst on the other side the DSS stopped benefits and found ways to force real poverty on peoples welfare entitlements regardless of age. The nature of this state started to be revealed in very real terms, and that wiped some mist from the eyes of many about places like Ireland, and what was going on there, the struggle of black people

down in London and other places. Social roles were starting to be challenged. Women not only 'manned' soup kitchens and the welfare infrastructure but argued among themselves about strategy, pickets, slogans, marriage and kids and ideas in general. Would groups be 'ladies' or 'wives' or 'women'? Sexual stereotyping, attitudes to gays, religious groups, everything which had been taken for granted was now no longer taken for granted.

circus, of Labour and Liberal trembled. That we didn't succeed was a consequence of conscious traitors in the Trade Union leadership, particularly in power stations, and steel works and among NACODS who seen and chose a side, consciously joining in to ensure the defeat of the miners. But it was also action by those individual workers who could not see the consequences, refused to see anything but their own selfish greed, which derailed

strike, collecting money and donating flowers to the nice policemen only to discover if you don't need coal mines, you don't need coal mine HQs and blocks of offices, and finally joined the miners... on the dole queue. The scabbing steel workers in Scotland Wales and Yorkshire, all closed down and dead and buried. Scab mercenary lorry drivers spreading strike breaking, from the miners, through the dockers, and the print workers, through animal

activists, through nuclear campaigners and presiding over destruction of social communities and solidarity and compassion.

Certainly it was a fight we had no choice but to

Yes we will cheer when Thatcher kicks the bucket, but it's the whole stinking system she fought for and defended which needs to go to the grave with her. That would be a lasting legacy for the pit communities of 84/85.

Victory was within grasp, we could feel it and taste it. Thatcher and MacGreggor have both admitted as much. If NACODS had implemented either of its mass pro-strike mandates, if the dockers had continued their blacking actions just days longer, if the TUC had implemented its national conference decisions, we would have won hands down.

Just think of what that victory would have meant in political terms, in class terms in social terms, coming at the end of such a polarisation of class forces and determined action on both sides. Twice in ten years an industrial union based on a community would have smashed a government policy and almost certainly would have smashed the Thatcher government too. Think of the consequences of that. The other side, not just the Tories and their establishment, but the whole parliamentary

us. At the end of the day, the dockers at Immingham, who allowed non union non dockers to load coal onto scab lorries, and in the process smashed their own dock labour scheme, and most of their jobs nationwide. The power station workers who scabbed very day, and ultimately seen two thirds of their own jobs go with the closure of the coal fired stations. The coking coal plants like Orgreave that worked on through the cavalry charges and pitched battles at their gates. The blackleg miners in Nottingham and Leicester, thrown on the scrap heap and their pits closed and communities decimated. The armies of female office workers, whose wages and conditions came from being part of the white collar section of the NUM. Whose allegiances and inflated self opinion however kept them working right through the

undertake, a battle the working class will never forget, and one we certainly didn't deserve to lose, for these ordinary folk, not trained soldiers or wild eyed zealots, had laid everything flesh and blood and even life could offer on the line. They had no more to give. Visit the former pit communities today and you will still see the results of that defeat, although come to think of it, visit almost any workplace in Britain and you will see it too. We must never forget who were our friends and who were our enemies in that war, nor the need to start seriously looking for the means of taking our revenge. Yes we will cheer when Thatcher kicks the bucket, but it's the whole stinking system she fought for and defended which needs to go to the grave with her. That would be a lasting legacy for the pit communities of 84/85.

ZAPATISTAS PUT AUTONOMY INTO PRACTICE

Last year the Zapatista movement of indigenous people in Chiapas, Mexico initiated some important new developments in the self-management of their 1,000 autonomous communities.

5,000 Zapatistas and thousands of supporters gathered in Oventik, Chiapas on the 8-9-10 August 2003 to celebrate a major step forward in the Zapatista's struggle for autonomy. The previous few weeks saw the rebels issue several communiqués of major importance. *"It is possible to govern and to govern ourselves without the parasite that calls itself government."*

Following the gutting of the Indigenous Law on Rights and Culture, *"the EZLN has decided to completely suspend any contact with the Mexican federal government and the political parties, and the Zapatista peoples have reaffirmed that resistance is their primary means of struggle"*, declared a Zapatista communiqué. (www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2003/07/274932.html).

"Now is the time to put the autonomy of the indigenous peoples into practice and to act on it throughout the entire country of Mexico. No one needs to ask permission to form their autonomous municipalities," declared Comandante Esther. *"In the same way,"* she continued, *"we are inviting all indigenous Mexican women to organise themselves so that, together, we can exercise autonomy and practise our rights which we deserve as women."*

The August event inaugurated five assemblies of 'good government' in Zapatista rebel territory, bringing an end to the 5 'Aguascalientes', set up

between 1994 and 1996. *"You are in autonomous rebel Zapatista territory: here the people govern, and the government obeys,"* read a sign at the entrance to the Caracol of Oventik. A festive atmosphere prevailed, with the speeches by the Commandantes of the EZLN's General Command, and the introductions of the Autonomous Councils, interspersed with basketball tournaments and dancing late into the night.

Delegates from each of the 30 Zapatista autonomous municipalities will comprise

below."

"AGAINST THE POWER OF MONEY"

The Zapatistas have declared their support at the world level for Venezuelan sovereignty, for the people of Iraq and for all those struggles in resistance against the power of money.

The communiqué of July 19, 2003 declared: *"To the People of Mexico: To the Peoples of the World: Brothers and Sisters: This is our word: FIRST. - The globalization of power has demonstrated throughout*

"And these have been our words, and what follows is dancing and struggling.

***Viva world resistance!
Viva world rebellion!
Viva the poor peoples of the world!"***

the five assemblies of 'good government' situated where the 5 'Aguascalientes' used to be. Following the uprising in 1994 the Zapatistas have created their own systems of grass-roots democracy, autonomous education, health care, justice, and production.

In opposition to the Mexican government's 'Plan Puebla Panama', the Zapatistas have called for the implementation of the people's 'Plan La Realidad Tijuana':

"The Plan involves linking all the resistances in our country and, along with them, rebuilding the Mexican nation from

the world that it has entered its most aggressive stage by making military war its primary weapon of domination. Nonetheless, the attack against the people of Iraq not only bore witness to globalization's true destructive nature, but it also provoked the greatest worldwide condemnation in the history of humanity. Despite the fallen statues, worldwide resistance and rebellion have been maintained and are growing. The Zapatista rebellion is just one small part of the great demonstration of human dignity throughout the planet..."

The historic weekend in

August also saw the public birth of the Zapatista Radio Insurgente - now accessible via Indymedia Chiapas <http://chiapas.indymedia.org> - transmitting from atop a Ceiba tree deep in rebel territory. DJ Marcos spun an eclectic bunch of disks, from Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young's "Ohio" to the "Zapatista Hymn", via Mexican ranchero music.

"NOW IS THE MOMENT..."

Comandanta Esther's speech at Oventik in August struck a powerful blow for women's autonomy, in a traditionally patriarchal culture.

"It is no longer the moment to be silent or to humiliate ourselves in front of men, nor to ask them for the favour of respecting us. Now is the moment for acting on our own and for making men respect our rights. Because, if we do not do so, no one is going to do it for us. It is up to us now, men and women, to act and to carry on, in order to build our autonomy and to move it forward."

One of the most fascinating of the recent Zapatista communiqués was that by Marcos entitled **"CHIAPAS: The Thirteenth Step Part Five: A History"** (www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2003/08/275062.html)

This communiqué describes the operations of the Zapatista grass-roots democracy, autonomous health and education services and other activities of the autonomous municipalities, such as questions of justice.

"The history of the rebel Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities is relatively young, it is 7 years old, going on 8. Although they were declared at the time the December 1994 siege was broken, the rebel

Zapatista Autonomous Municipalities (the MAREZ) still took a while to become reality. Today, the exercise of indigenous autonomy is a reality in Zapatista lands, and we are proud to say that it has been led by the communities themselves.

What I mean by this is that the EZLN's military structure in some way "contaminated" a tradition of democracy and self-governance. The EZLN was, in a manner of speaking, one of the "undemocratic" elements in a relationship of direct community democracy (another anti-democratic element is the Church, but that's a matter for another paper).

When the Autonomous Municipalities began operating, self-governance did not move just from the local to the regional, it also emerged (always tendentially) from the "shadow" of the military structure. The EZLN does not intervene at all in the designation or removal of autonomous authorities, and it has limited itself to only pointing out that, given that the EZLN, by principle, is not fighting for the taking of power, none of the military command or members of the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee can occupy a position of authority in the community or in the Autonomous Municipalities. Those who decide to participate in the autonomous governments must definitively resign from

their organizational position within the EZLN."

"GOVERNING BY OBEYING"

The next communique "CHIAPAS: The Thirteenth Stele Part Six: A Good

Municipalities: the provision of justice; community health; education; housing; land; work; food; commerce; information and culture, and local movement...Perhaps a new

long urged.

Of course, as Marcos himself admits, the Zapatista autonomous communities are no utopia, and elements of bureaucracy and hierarchy exist, but from what we know the tendency is towards more power residing in the hands of the indigenous peasant peoples at local level.

I can think of no better way to finish than to quote comandante Zebedeo who concluded the Zapatista communique on the Global Day of Resistance against the September WTO summit at Cancun thus :

"And these have been our words, and what follows is dancing and struggling.

Viva world

resistance!

Viva world rebellion! Viva the poor peoples of the world!"

For up-to-date info about the situation in Chiapas, go to <http://>

chiapas.indymedia.org published in Spanish and English, and also see the Zapatista section on www.indymedia.org.uk

The Zapatista solidarity groups in Edinburgh (www.edinchiapas.org.uk/ edinchiapas@yahoo.co.uk) and London (weareallzapatistas@yahoo.co.uk) welcome involvement.

Kiptik do invaluable solidarity work including the construction of drinking water systems in Zapatista communities. See www.kiptik.buz.org and contact kiptik@eudoramail.com

MV



The Zapatistas have declared their support at the world level for Venezuelan sovereignty, for the people of Iraq and for all those struggles in resistance against the power of money.

Government" outlines how Zapatista autonomy operates. (www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2003/08/275075.html)

"In order to see to it that, in rebel Zapatista lands, governing is governing by obeying, the 'Good Government Assemblies' will be formed on August 9, 2003. They shall be seated in the 'Caracoles,' with one assembly for each rebel region, and will be formed by 1 or 2 delegates from each one of the Autonomous Councils of that region. The following will continue to be the exclusive government functions of the Rebel Zapatista Autonomous

world is being built...."

While naturally anarchists and libertarian communists balk at the term "government", whether 'good' or 'bad', we need to look beyond the superficiality of the words used. It is arguable that the Zapatista concept of "governing by obeying", and their practice of "consultas" whereby major decisions are referred back to the grass-roots village level for the final decision, are in practice very similar to the concepts of "re-callable mandated delegates" and "the administration of things" which anarchists and libertarian communists have

"If the aggression is globalised then the resistance needs to be globalised."

In June and July of 2003, two Argentinian women toured the UK to talk about the wave of social change which is sweeping their home country. Graciela and Neka talked about the Piquetero movement, which has seen unemployed workers taking control of over 200 factories, and organising a direct democracy through neighbourhood assemblies. The movement has also organised road blockades in resistance to the neo-liberal reforms which are leaving many Argentinians unemployed.

The tour was organised by the Argentina Autonomist Project (AAP), an group which seeks to educate people around the world about the struggles in Argentina.

I met up with Graciela at the Glasgow event, to find out more...

How did you become involved with the AAP?

Graciela: I was an activist in Argentina for many years. After the dictatorship, from 1984 onwards, I was a human rights activist, a student in college. I organised in a pretty straightforward manner until 1990.

I was a Trotskyist at some point and then I realised that the Trotskyist party was really hierarchical and corrupted. I started also having political differences [with the Trotskyists]; I started not agreeing with the "dictatorship of the proletariat" and all that stuff. So, we started organising a non-hierarchical organisation, with many other people who were coming from similar experiences with parties.

I met with a group that was doing performances in the

An Interview with a piquetera

street, and I started incorporating the little puppets I was building with these performances. I started making them bigger, and incorporating puppets into politics.

But in 1994, I left Argentina to go and work with a big street theatre company, Bread and Puppets Theater of the US, and I worked with them for quite a few years. At the same time I was going down to Argentina to organise street performances, with the mothers and children of the Disappeared.

Finally, when the insurrection started in Argentina, I had no money whatsoever, so I couldn't go back at that point. It was very frustrating for me in December 2001 to be in Vermont just watching it on TV! Then I went with Bread and Puppets Theater to organise a protest against the G8 in Calgary. I heard, because a friend phoned me, that friends of my friend had been killed in a road blockade in Argentina. So I went back to Argentina and I helped organise a big puppet theatre thing to protest the killing of these two compañeros. After that I decided I needed to devote a lot more time to the struggle in Argentina, because there were many autonomist organisations, and I felt that this was a good time to do some organising. So that's how I started the project.

How important is it that the movement is non-hierarchical? What have been the benefits of organising in this way?

G: I think it's very important, because during the 70s all our organisations were

extremely hierarchical, and some of them even militaristic. I think that because of these issues they separated themselves from the people. So when the repression started [the organisations] were on their own, and people didn't feel they were represented by them... They let whatever was happening to them, happen.

So now that we are organising in a non-hierarchical, horizontal way, we have no leaders, and it will be a lot more difficult to stop us now... One of the organisers was killed on June 26th 2002. Maybe in a normal sense you could think that he was a leader, because he was very committed to the struggle and he was very informed... Well, his disappearance - although it was very painful for us, and it had a huge impact on the organisation - it did not leave a hole. Immediately somebody else came... and we kept on going.

Obviously the piqueteras have been very successful. What are the practical aspects of organising in a non-hierarchical way, in a movement that has so many people involved?

G: It takes a lot of meetings! It's not very dynamic sometimes, it takes a lot of time. People need to allow a lot of time for discussions and re-discussions...

I think the biggest challenge is all the old things that keep coming up. People are raised in a capitalist system, so although they might want to change, still, many times, stupid things come up, individualistic things. It's very important for us to allow time to discuss all the

issues.

So any project that is done in the neighbourhoods - because more important than the road blockades is the organising in the neighbourhoods, all the micro-enterprises where people cover their own basic needs - that requires an enormous amount of meetings and discussions. It's not fast!

Is there any hierarchy of the groups? Do you have smaller local groups who send representatives to a central group? Or is it completely horizontal?

G: There are assemblies and groups in every neighbourhood where we are organised. Then there's what we call the "Coordinating Chair". People who go to this Chair have discussions and then bring back to the assemblies what the Chair has discussed. That's where we try to coordinate the different movements, because there are seventeen different groups working. So it takes a lot of going back and forth from this big coordinating organisation to all the little assemblies by neighbourhood. But the people who are elected to this Chair, you can tell them: "We don't want you to go anymore. We want so-and-so to start going now." So in that way we keep it non-hierarchical.

Have political parties tried to take over the movement?

G: When I talk about the autonomists, this is a sector of the unemployed workers, and most of the popular assemblies of Buenos Aires are autonomous too. But there was a time when the assemblies were a lot bigger, immediately after the insurrection of December

2001. Particularly the Trotskyist parties had a really nasty attitude towards [the assemblies], and they destroyed many of the popular assemblies because they evaluated that they were going to be right wing! So they would come with long lists of things that people had to vote for, and if they didn't then they thought that they were done. So that introduced a brutal amount of stress in the assemblies and it lowered the amount of people that participated. People who didn't have political experience just didn't want to deal with them, basically. So a lot of people left due to this.

In the piquetero movement, in the unemployed workers' movement, there are huge organisations of Trotskyists and other hierarchical organisations... The Communist Party also has representation there. Even worse than that, the Peronists have a lot, nationalist leftist groups and the Maoists also have a lot of representation.

So there are some of us who are organised autonomously and some who are still organising in the old ways.

What role have the internet and Indymedia played in making people aware of what's going on?

G: I would say that Indymedia was key in helping the movement organise itself... Normal people that are not within the movement do not access Indymedia and don't even know that Indymedia exists. But it was very important for us as a movement to have Indymedia there.

Many times I think things didn't go even worse because the Indymedia photographers were there and the cops felt exposed by them.

What is the role of women in the piquetera movement?

Have you ever come across sexism or other discrimination?

G: The role of women is very important. At the beginning of the movement it was 90% women who were doing road blockades and organising in the neighbourhoods. Now it's more evened out.

More than discrimination or sexism, what I see in the movement is that women are not yet empowered enough. They rely on the guys still for some of the stuff. Like I was present one day that there was a discussion amongst them where one of the women said, "We want to be the ones to talk to the press."

The guys said, "Well, which one of you is going to talk?" And none of them wanted to. So many times I think it's more the problem of the woman who doesn't go and fight that space, than the guys telling them to shut up.

There is some sexism, but I would say that in the autonomous movement it's not blatant at all. It's something that people problematise and discuss and think about.

How does your movement connect to other struggles worldwide, and in South America?

G: There's links with the landless peasants of Brazil, links with some other organisations in Ecuador, and in other parts of Latin America. I don't think that there's as much communication as there should be. I think we're struggling with that.

What do you think of the leftist governments in Brazil and Venezuela? Do you

think there's any chance of working with hierarchical leftist movements in other countries?

G: I personally do not trust that kind of political system. I think we've had experiences similar to that in the past... I think there's quite a clear limit to how



much they can progress towards social change. I know a lot of people are very interested in this process but I'm personally not very moved by it.

On the Piquetera Tour, you use puppets to educate people about what's going on in Argentina. Do artists have a big role to play in the piquetera movement and the AAP? What other methods have you used to educate people through entertainment?

G: The autonomous movement is very interested in different ways of telling the story. So there's a lot of folk musicians connected with the movement. Also a lot of folks who do what we call "visual interventions": not necessarily performances like I do, but they will come up with huge sculpted figures, or they will paste a whole city with posters, or they'll do T-shirts at the road blockades for people to wear. There's a lot, I think, of artistic stuff going on around.

What have been your impressions of the anarchist/libertarian movements in other countries you've visited,

especially here in the UK?

G: Unfortunately we haven't had a chance to really get to meet the movement... Our presentations usually last two hours, and people are so interested in finding out what we do, that we never have a chance to learn what they do!

So far, I wouldn't be able to say what I really think about them. They've been extremely cooperative and in solidarity with us, but I haven't seen the work that they've been doing.

What are your hopes for the future of the movement in Argentina?

G: I hope that it will be able to grow and expand: that that time will be given to us, which is not certain... I hope that we'll keep on working the way we are, and that we'll be able to reach more people.

Finally, how can people in the UK offer solidarity to the piqueteras?

G: I think the best way to offer solidarity is to organise in your own communities around your own needs. Because the problems of the unemployed of Argentina are the problems that people will have all over the world. Globalisation affects every one of us, and if it's not hitting too hard here now, it might hit really hard in the near future. If the aggression is globalised then the resistance needs to be globalised.

Find out more about the struggles in Argentina on the AAP's website - www.autonomista.org

{This interview of Graciela Monteagudo was carried out by Morag Forbes. Feel free to reproduce it in its original form, as long as you do so in a not-for-profit way, and acknowledge the author and the interviewee. If you want to publish the interview in an altered form, please ask first: manga_mog@hotmail.com}.}

Mayday in Dublin

This year saw an EU summit in Dublin. It fell on May Day. Irish anarchists organised against it. Black Flag interviewed one of the organisers of the march against the EU summit. A member of the **Workers Solidarity Movement**, he is speaking here in a personal capacity. More information on the protests can be found at indymedia.ie and struggle.ws/eufortress

Q. Can you give a short introduction to anarchism in Ireland in the past few years?

Basically the libertarian movement has seen a major breakthrough in Ireland over the last three or so years. The basis of this has been a series of very broad libertarian island wide meetings under the title of the 'Grassroots Gathering' out of which numerous actions have now been organised. In the last few months we have seen the emergence of city based networks linked to this. The Mayday protests were organised by one of these, the Dublin Grassroots Network.

Q. Can you summarise the main aims of your Mayday protests?

To expose the current policies of the EU as racist, militaristic and attacking working people. The actual forms of the actions were secondary to this but their main aim was to get as many ordinary people as possible out on the streets.

Q. What was organised?

There were eight separate actions each aiming at highlighting specific aspects of the EU. These ranged from a Critical Mass bicycle ride to no borders street theatre and picnic to breaking open a private city centre park to marching on the EU summit to a Reclaim the Streets party. More detail on all of these on our website.

Q. How were they organised? Did anarchists in Ireland work together?

They were organised by the Dublin Grassroots Network which includes most if not all anarchists active in Dublin. Libertarians from other cities helped organise specific aspects (like food) or simply travelled to Dublin to help out over the weekend.

Each event was taken on by a sub group of DGN which feed back into a number of publicly advertised DGN assemblies. This meant the details of each event could be kept somewhat secret while involving a larger number in the organising work. Not of course foolproof and were 'infiltrated' by journalists who ended up dishing out our leaflets.

Q. Irish Indymedia gave a flavour of the anti-anarchist hype the media was ped-

dling. It made the London hysteria seem tame. Why do you think the media did it? Are anarchists in Ireland such a threat to capitalism?

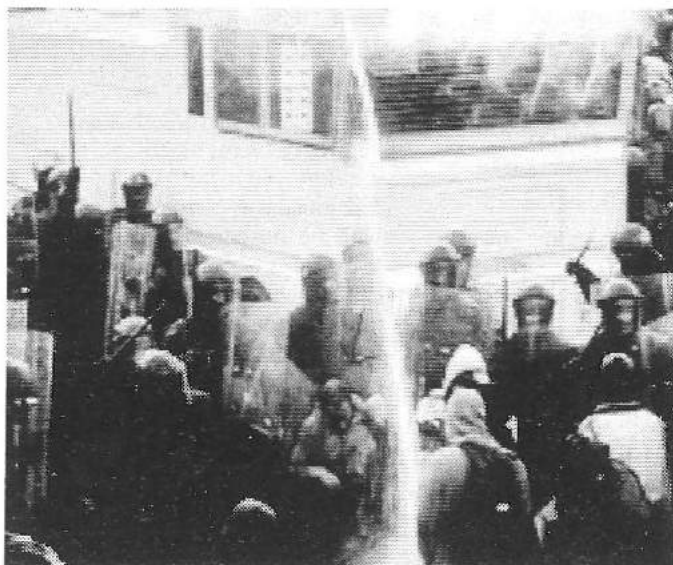
I wish we were! The reason for the media hype was clearly to frighten people away from the protests. There are probably several reasons for this and one would be the threat of the growing libertarian movement. But this element should not be exaggerated, the state would have seen the republican movement in the 1970's and 1980's as a much, much greater threat. We have grown fast but we are still only a few hundred rather loosely organised activists and a couple of much smaller and more tightly organised anarchist groups.

Q. How did your group respond to the media attacks?

We set up a media group with four mandated spokespeople and a similar number of others to help with background work. This was intended anyway but it meant we could quite quickly start replying to the various panic stories the government were planting in the press. As many of these were ridiculous ('Anarchist army plans bloodbath in Ireland') over time this worked in our favour as people began to support us because of the attacks.

We were able to get articles into many of the newspapers and live appearances on both national radio and TV to put across our position. Probably most importantly about a week before the summit we were on the 'Late, Late Show' a TV chat show that almost everyone watches (even if no one admits to it). On the simplest level allowing people to see what an anarchist actually looked like made a lot of the media fear stories ('Anarchists plan gas attack that will kill 10,000') seem ridiculous.

As well as countering the hype this also enabled us to briefly explain what anarchists actually stood for and to get across that we were protesting at EU policies rather than either the existence or expansion of the EU. Of course many papers and journalists remained hostile to us but the stuff they were writing contrasted so sharply with the stuff people could read and hear elsewhere that it became very obvious to most of the population that they were lying. This produced a large positive reaction towards us by those who recognised and rejected the lies for what



The police opened up with the water cannon that they had borrowed from the PSNI (RUC). This was the first time water cannon had been used in Ireland.

they were.

Q. Was the May Day media madness an isolated case?

We faced a very much weaker version of the same sort of stuff in the run up to our attempted March 1st direct action at Shannon Airport during the Iraq war. In that case we failed to get our media act together until the last moment and this had a very damaging effect on the number who turned out. We had 300 at Shannon, we had well over 3,000 marching on the EU summit.

Q. What about the state. How did it respond to the protests?

In the last 36 hours it panicked and via the media revealed a de facto ban on one of our events, the march on the EU summit. Basically they revealed they had ordered the Gardai (police) to attack anyone attempting to march to our assembly point and that the riot squad would occupy the assembly point in case anyone made it that far.

In the fortnight beforehand they also carried out a low level campaign of harassment of DGN activists seeking to publicise the event. Over 3 days every door to door leafletting session we organised was stopped by police who demanded to know the names and addresses of those taking part. This ended once we were refusing to give this information (we could have been arrested but were not) and because we were feeding details of each harassment to journalists. I don't think anything was published but on live shows our spokespeople mentioned it and the Gardai press office had to field queries on this.

Q. How did the left respond to the media hysteria? Was there much solidarity or was it the usual opportunistic attacks?

The organised far left were pretty useless as were the Greens and Labour Party. Basically the media was carrying on an anti-anarchist witch hunt complete with 'exposes' of some of our spokespeople ('The anarchist leader

who teaches our kids by day'). The left 'responded' by suggesting that not many anarchists would take part in the protests! Obviously they felt that everyone except anarchists should have the right to protest! As might be expected the SWP were the worst, they went so far as to announce on radio that our march was cancelled and that everyone should go on theirs!

Q. What happened on May Day itself?

There were several events but the one that attracted the most attention was the banned march. Basically we announced a new form up point slap bang in the city centre outside the GPO. Several thousand people turned up there and we asked them whether we

to take more militant action which meant solidarity could be maintained between both blocs.

As there were two water cannons and thousands of riot police waiting for those trying to push through it was clear that the attempt would fail but it was good they made the point by trying to do so. The police opened up with the water cannon that they had borrowed from the PSNI (RUC). This was the first time water cannon had been used in Ireland. Riot police also batoned protesters as they pushed them back down the road and a number of broken bones resulted.

We then all marched into town as a block with the riot police and water



should just protest at the ban there or defy it and march on Farmleigh. Overwhelmingly people wanted to march (as we expected) so we set off.

We actually covered about 6 of the 9km before the Gardai managed to form a solid enough barrier to stop us. As DGN had advertised a non violent march we stopped some 100m from this police line. A section of the march then broke away to try and push through the police line, which most of the participants followed. Those who remained with the DGN banners formed up to prevent them being cut off and so that we could march back into the city centre together once their attempted break through had been repelled. We had always made clear that we respected the choices of other groups

cannon launching limited attacks on our rear that were obviously designed to panic us into a rout so they could send in snatch squads. However although some people defending the rear were arrested we did manage to march all the way back into town as a single bloc.

Q. Did the media have a negative impact on the May Day protests in terms of numbers? What about state repression?

No. The smear campaign was so crude that it resulted in a lot of sympathy for us. Getting people onto the media meant that we could announce details of many of our events. Finally the attempted ban on the march meant that in the 24 hours before the protest our new assembly point and time was one of the first news items on many TV and radio shows.

State repression appeared to have a small effect at first in making some activists reluctant to engage in further public activity. But we still managed to distribute the 50,000 leaflets we had printed explaining the protest. And it clearly backfired as that it meant many people came out to defend our freedom to protest.

The state repression is not however over. Over 30 were arrested and many have been denied bail by a court specially set up to try them despite the fact they are facing very minor charges. Right now DGN are working on their release and demanding that all charges are dropped.

Q. Has the May Day protests and hype increased interest in anarchism?

Yes although as yet we don't know how long lasting this will be. Beyond this interest though the several thousand people who choose to take part in a libertarian organised event will mostly have had a positive impression of doing so.

Q. What lessons did you gain from the experience?

Don't be afraid of using the media, it is not a question of getting accurate articles published but of getting enough accurate information so that those sympathetic to our position can at least recognise it. Even some of the 'expos' were quite good in this respect, they simply served to polarise the situation so that while right wingers would hate us more those who had problems with the current set up would recognise what they had in common with us. By the end even the most hostile media found it necessary to include quotes from our press releases.

But don't rely on the media for getting your message across. The media were very interested in talking to us about the potential for violence, they had almost no interest in talking about why we were opposing the direction the EU is taking or what our alternative was. In getting across these long term ideas the 50,000 leaflets we distributed were essential. Printing these consumed the

bulk of our fund raising in advance of the protests.

Secondly make sure you are trying to explain yourself to and mobilise all working people and not just the much more limited number of activists. Internally we had quite a bit of debate about whether this was possible but in the end the number who turned out for the Farmleigh march, 95% of whom were



not members of anything, demonstrated that we could indeed reach a least a small minority. This small minority is something to build from in the future.

Thirdly that state oppression can be used as a way of mobilising people in itself. In particular through indymedia we could inform activists of each step as it happened and our response to it. This and the media hype meant that by the time the state moved to ban the march quite a head of anger had built up that we were able to tap into. This probably doubled or trebled the number of people who turned out.

Fourthly, while for tactical reasons it can be wise to limit the tactics you intend to use, you can still maintain good relations with those who wish to carry out more militant actions. Above all else making it clear that you won't condemn those who choose to carry out more militant but separate actions is essential to this. Of course this is a two way process and those who favoured more militant tactics also worked hard at maintaining a sense of solidarity and common purpose.

Q. Has the media commented on how wrong its pre-May Day hype was?

It would be more accurate to say that the media fractured in advance of May day and has remained fractured since. Some continue to run ludicrous stories and insist that the massive security operation somehow stopped their worst predictions coming true. A minority have published articles that we could almost have written ourselves. Indeed

one journalist who was soaked by the water cannon reportedly joined in the chants of 'fuck the police' as we marched back into town.

There is little point in imagining you can win all or even most of the corporate media over. What you can do in some cases is get enough counter information into the media so that many people become aware that the scare articles are just that and so stop taking them at face value.

Q. What now? What are anarchists in

Ireland planning to do next?

In the short term we will be active in mobilising a no vote to a racist referendum being held June 11. After this George Bush is in Ireland for an EU summit at the end of June and we are already mobilising to disrupt this. A busy month is ahead.

Q. And what about next year's May Day?

I don't think we should get too hung up on always pulling some sort of spectacular on May day. Apart from anything else this can make it seem to those outside the movement that this is all we are about. That said I'm sure we will continue to take part in the union marches and organise our own events like RTS.

But I think in the longer term the real question is how do we turn our success in mobilising around the global issues of the Iraq war and the EU into mobilising around local issues in the workplace and the community. Building a real movement that can withstand state repression over the longer period requires this.

Spirit of Rebellion

The last two years have seen an impressive up turn in industrial militancy amongst workers. While official figures are not available yet it seems likely that 2003 will top 2002's ten year high for days lost to industrial action. Postal workers, ship makers, fire fighters, nursery school teachers, university lecturers, civil servants, baggage handlers, security staff, hospital cleaners, bus drivers, IT staff, refuse collectors, even school children have all taken industrial action in the last twelve months

Wildcat strikes have returned with a vengeance. Benefit Office civil servants, British Airways check-in staff, warehouse staff, postal workers and fire fighters have all recently staged unofficial action. The unofficial postal dispute involved some 35,000 workers. There have also been work-ins and worker occupations most notably at the Appledore dockyard in Devon.

Disputes have occurred across a wide range of industries, involved both male and female dominated workforces, white and blue collar workers. While most remain about pay, a large number have involved disputes over working practices and conditions. Plymouth City Council planners, for example, refused to answer their phones because of unmanageable workloads. The wildcat action by Heathrow staff was about proposed changes to working hours.

There have also been some notable victories. The train drivers' union ASLEF secured full recognition rights with Heathrow Express following a one day work to rule. Unofficial action in postal sorting offices in Oxford and Wolverhampton forced management climb downs. But there have also been defeats. National ballots organised by the CWU (Royal Mail), NUT (teachers) and FBU (fire fighters) were lost. Britain's longest running dispute at Friction Dynamics was abandoned after two years and eight months.

The British left tends to see any upswing in industrial action as heralding a return to some Golden Age of worker militancy (and Socialist Worker paper sales!) Some caution is required. In 2002, the last available official figures, 1.3 million working days were lost due to strikes. In 1972 24 million were. In 1979 29 million were. In 2002 the actual number of disputes was under 200 (the lowest figure ever) and a handful of major actions accounted for

the majority of lost days. During the 1950s, 60s and 70s 3,000, 4,000, 5,000 or more workplaces were regularly hit by industrial action. Only 1 in 5 of the workforce now belongs to a union and half of those in work have never belonged to a union in their life. In 1979 57% of the workforce was a member of a union (membership actually peaked the following year). Currently in the private sector just 19% of workers belong to unions (60% in the public sector do).

This is not to be pessimistic. It took the state nearly two decades, mass unemployment, the defeat of the miners and the most restrictive anti-union legislation in Europe (kept in place by New Labour) to push the union movement to its modern low point. It will take time for the labour movement to recover its strength, but recovering it does appear to be. What is encouraging is that this recovery is being led from the shop floor. To borrow a phrase of Kropotkin a spirit of rebellion is building amongst workers which should help lay the foundations of increased class consciousness.

Anarchists, while critical of reformist trade unions, support working class struggle. Anarchists also point to the role of the state in industrial action. The fact that so many workers have been willing to ignore the law and stage wildcat actions is particularly welcome. It is interesting that the state has to date not prosecuted a single person who has taken unofficial action. As Bob Crowe general secretary of the RMT said "Why bother with ballots – where does it get us?" This may change. If industrial action continues to rise the state will intervene more. Moreover most of the major disputes (fire fighters, civil servants and university lecturers) are with the state itself. Efforts by New Labour to keep public sector pay rises below inflation (the trigger for the civil service dispute) and introduce so-called modernisation means it likely that the public sector will see further unrest in the coming year.

Much has been made of the general secretaries like Bob Crowe, Tony Woodley of the T&G, Mark Serwotka of public service union PCS and the rest of the 'awkward squad'. Anarchists warn workers not to trust leaders. Trade union leaders sit at the top of hierarchical structures earning substantially more than their members. For all his militancy, for example,

Serwotka has only called for a two day strike amongst civil servants hoping that this would bring employers to a negotiated settlement. Crowe called off a tube strike in the run-up to Christmas in support of a sacked driver and union activist. While better than what came before the awkward squad still prefer compromise to conflict. One day actions and work to rules are preferred to all out strikes.

Malatesta warned that anarchists should strive to "prevent unions from becoming tools for the politicians for electoral or other authoritarian means" (*The Anarchist Revolution*). His warning is as valid now as when he wrote it. Crowe and Serwotka were both instrumental in the creation with George Galloway and the SWP of the Respect (Unity) Coalition. The T&G's Woodley has called for a meeting of union sponsored Labour MPs with the aim of 'reclaiming' the Labour Party. The T&G like other Labour Party affiliates hand millions of their members' money over to a party whose leader once boasted that Britain had the toughest employment laws in Britain!

This is a long way from anarchist notions of worker control and self organisation. Important things are happening though. The postal dispute and the Appledore sit-in show that workers are willing to organise themselves. At Appledore the 550 workers faced with the closure of the oldest commercial ship builders in Britain occupied it. The workers continued to train apprentices despite receiving no pay. In the postal dispute local reps in the London Divisional Committee took control of the dispute which shut down London (and other areas') postal services.

The growing number of disputes shows that the myth that there can be common cause (partnership) between bosses and workers is not being bought by the working classes. Industrial action is a sign of growing class consciousness. It is important that this is not wasted by channelling into revolutionary dead ends like the Respect Coalition or the Scottish Socialist Party (currently receiving cash from the RMT).

Anarchists need to argue that workers do not need bosses, not just the bosses at their workplace but bosses in Parliament and in the unions. The union general secretary like the politician is ultimately interested in their own position and power. Workers are showing that they do not need leaders. As spirit of rebellion is building.

Sucking the Golden Egg

A platformist response to "post-anarchism"

by "Peter Kropotkin", ZACF, southern Africa

Comrades: The following is a response by the zabalaza anarchist communist federation (zacf) of southern africa to an article by Saul Newman entitled "anarchism and the politics of resentment"

In the midst of the establishment's persistent refusal to understand anarchism, of its constant attempts to portray us as a bunch of violent lunatics; in the face of continual misrepresentations by the Marxists, of their efforts to portray us as a petty-bourgeois movement that rejects organisation and can never be truly revolutionary; in the face of all this systematic misunderstanding and refusal to engage, it is a relief to encounter a piece of criticism that makes some attempt to understand what anarchism is about, notes some of our good points, offers (mostly) coherent and (as far as I know) original arguments, and at least attempts to present itself as making constructive proposals. Nonetheless, I wish to argue that Saul Newman's article 'Anarchism and the Politics of Resentment' is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of anarchism, and that its proposals amount to a rejection of the real point of our movement.

It will not surprise the reader to learn that Newman's article belongs to the postmodernist tradition - or perhaps one should say the 'post-ist' tradition generally, since he identifies his proposals as 'post-anarchism'. He draws extensively on Foucault (although the main source of his criticism is Nietzsche) and, in the best fragmentary post-ist manner ends up explicitly rejecting a general movement to change society, and implicitly rejecting any general theoretical social criticism as well. In places his writing suffers from the obscurity characteristic of postmodernist work, but he is not nearly as bad as some others. In short, his article is a good example of the theoretical and practical inadequacy of post-ism.

Newman illustrates his

(mis)understanding of anarchist thought with extensive quotations from Bakunin and Kropotkin. I could take the time to find many other quotes to refute his interpretation, but this would be beside the point for several reasons. For one thing, it is always possible to distort a text through selective quotation; arguing from isolated quotes might go on forever. It is better to let the authors speak for themselves - particularly in the case of Bakunin and Kropotkin whom I have always found fairly easy to read. From the point of



view of plain understanding it always amazes me how drastically they have been misinterpreted; but after a while one gets tired of stating the obvious. Again, we know that Bakunin and Kropotkin have made serious errors, but these do not invalidate the tradition of anarchist thought which they founded. Even if they were guilty of everything Newman accuses them of, while this might mean that most subsequent anarchists are either completely misreading Bakunin and Kropotkin or missing out important aspects of their ideas, we still remain rooted in an intellectual tradition which, I maintain, is immune to Newman's attacks and would be undermined by his supposed remedies. It is this tradition, rather than Bakunin and Kropotkin as individuals, that I wish to defend. I must add that the intellectual tradition is intimately

linked to a great tradition of struggle and revolutionary practice, a link which I will show Newman almost completely ignores.

The core of Newman's argument is as follows: Anarchism is infected with 'resentment', a concept drawn from Nietzsche, and definable as 'moral prejudice of the powerless against the powerful'. This manifests itself in anarchist thought as hostility to power in general and the state in particular;

Newman contrasts this with the Marxist emphasis on class and economics, but maintains that anarchism has fallen into a similar trap. Anarchism, he says, is based on a positive view of human nature as essentially social and co-operative (an element which he rightly contrasts with social contract theories). He maintains that we root our struggle to destroy the state in this essentially moral human subjectivity. While acknowledging that this ethical approach might have value independently of the struggle against the state, Newman holds that the contrast between state and power on the one hand, and co-operative society and human subjectivity on the other, is naive in that it fails to assimilate the understanding (found in Nietzsche and Foucault) that power is ubiquitous in human life and that opposing it is futile

even if we wanted to. He allows for a contrast between power and domination, which, following Foucault, he defines, not very helpfully, as congealed power. Domination can be resisted, but it is still too closely related to power to be utterly defeated. In particular, it is futile to hope for the revolutionary destruction of the state; this hope depends on a Manichean dream of getting rid of domination, and is likely to end up negating itself and turning into a new form of oppression. Instead, he advocates 'post-anarchism', which seems to consist in an application of anarchist ideas - perhaps most particularly mutual aid, but freed from 'essentialist' ideas about human nature; also the link between liberty and equality, which liberals wrongly see as being opposed to each other - in opposition to particular instances of

domination in everyday life, but without revolutionary dreams.

An important feature of Newman's argument is his recognition of the anarchist emphasis on the social and co-operative nature of human beings, a key aspect of our thinking which cruder critics tend to ignore or over-hastily dismiss. But even his understanding of this element is deeply flawed. To begin with, he rather curiously locates Stirnerite individualism within the anarchist current, although it should be obvious that an approach that emphasises the individual at the expense of mutual aid is incompatible with anarchist social theory as he, and we, understand it. This suggests that he has momentarily fallen into the common error of identifying as anarchist any theory that stands in opposition to the state. This is curious since Newman, like many others,

puts anarchism in contrast to Marxism; but Marxists also tend to regard the state as oppressive and believe that it will eventually have to go (however much they insist that it can be used in the short term). Such a crude emphasis on opposition to the state is often

associated with a failure to recognise the distinctive anarchist intellectual tradition. But although Newman shows signs of making this error, he is not as guilty of it as some others; nor is it the deepest flaw in his argument.

A more important question is how we understand the principle of the social nature of humanity, the 'optimistic conception of human nature'. On the one hand, Newman attributes to us the view (drawn from Kropotkin) that 'the natural and essential principle of human society is mutual aid, and that man is naturally cooperative, sociable and altruistic, rather than competitive and egotistic.' On the other hand, he subsequently notes that Bakunin identifies a 'natural lust for power' as a feature of all human beings. Newman identifies these elements as signs of a contradiction in anarchist thought, or perhaps an indication that Bakunin had dimly seen something that undermines our whole perspective of human nature, and with it our entire political approach. Newman thinks that our view of human nature, while it has some value, is

nonetheless a major flaw in our thinking as it stands. But is he correct?

Many social and political theorists have played fast and loose with notions of human nature - usually taking an egoistic approach in support of authoritarian theories. No doubt many anarchists have been guilty of a mirror image of the same error; or of related errors like Malatesta's teleological view that society is 'tending towards a goal' of greater co-operation and solidarity. But such approaches are no more intrinsic to anarchism than is historical determinism. It seems to me that the core of the anarchist position on these matters consists in (a) a rejection of egoistic theories of human nature; and (b) the view that human nature is essentially social. The latter element implies a natural capacity for co-operation and mutual aid; it does not

revolutions do not consist simply in the destruction of the state. In Spain workers seized factories, peasants took over the land, militias were established for self-defence, and production was at least partly restructured on a basis of mutual aid . . . And such is not only our practice but our theory as well.

imply that humans are entirely altruistic or that egoistic elements, lust for power and the like, are completely absent. I should add that one can expect the relative predominance of these elements to be influenced by the character of the society we live in. It is in relation to this perspective that I wish to examine Newman's criticisms.

To begin with, what does this perspective imply for Newman's claim that anarchist resistance is primarily rooted in human moral subjectivity? I should first point out that Newman's thesis involves a misunderstanding that is linked to his exaggeration of our differences with Marx. He correctly points out that we place far more emphasis on the state, and direct far more of our fire against it, than the Marxists do; that we make no absolute claim that it is subordinate to class interests; and that we firmly reject the Marxist view that the state might be turned to revolutionary purposes. But his claim that 'Rather than working from the society to the State - and seeing the State as the derivative of economic

relations - anarchists work from the State to society' is a caricature of our approach. After all, anarchists since Bakunin have attacked private property, capitalism and the bourgeoisie as fiercely as we have attacked the state. If we do not usually accept simple economic determinism of the Marxist kind, we do generally hold that the state and the ruling class are intimately related; and I would want to claim, as I think would most anarchists, that the relationship works in both directions. Newman alludes to Bakunin's (correct) prediction that the establishment of a Marxist 'workers' state' would lead to the transformation of the 'revolutionary vanguard' into a new ruling class; we would certainly agree that this is not the only instance of state power giving rise to class oppression; but we must also recognise that a ruling class does

need a state to hold on to power; and we can present numerous instances of states acting in the immediate economic interests of the bourgeoisie. It is for these reasons that class struggle, contra Newman, is central to anarchist theory - and even more central to anarchist practice.

Newman, then, is incorrect in denying the

importance of the class distinction in anarchist theory. It is certainly true that the state/society distinction also plays an important role, particularly in Kropotkin; there is even a grain of truth in the claim that resistance is rooted in human subjectivity. We do maintain that the capacity for mutual aid and solidarity, and the love of freedom, are important elements in human nature and manifest themselves spontaneously in a great variety of circumstances; forms of organisation appropriate to anarchism frequently emerge among people without any background in our ideas. But I see no evidence that we have ever made this the sole basis of our resistance. We believe that the class struggle and the experience of oppression compel the oppressed to resist their oppressors; that this struggle itself teaches the oppressed the need for revolutionary change, and enables them to build in their organs of struggle the forms and structures of a better society; that struggle itself contributes to the development of subjectivity; in short, that resistance is rooted both in subjectivity and in objective condi-

tions. To say otherwise is a travesty of our theories; even worse, it is a travesty of our practical experience of a century of struggle throughout the world.

As for the claims that 'The State is essential to the existence of revolutionary subject, just as the revolutionary subject is essential to the existence of the State', and that 'Without this stultifying oppression, the anarchist subject would be unable to see itself as 'moral' and 'rational'', they are worse than a travesty; they are mere sophistry. Sure, if no state had ever existed, we would not have to make a big issue of opposing states, and would probably not define ourselves as 'an-archists'; but people could still hold similar positive views about liberty, equality, and mutual aid, and how to organise society to promote these aims. Again, if and when we do succeed in destroying the state, opposing it may no longer be our biggest priority, but that will certainly not negate the value of our ideas in general. The fact that anarchist thought originated in response to state and class oppression does not mean that it is defined by oppression; and it certainly does not change the fact that oppression is the main obstacle to the achievement of our goals.

This brings me to the question of revolution, and to Newman's point that 'To abolish central institutions like the State with one stroke would be to neglect the multiform and diffuse relations of power they are based on, thus allowing new institutions and relations of domination to rise up.' I should start by noting that the danger of new institutions of domination arising out of revolution is hardly one of which anarchists are unaware; we have seen Newman himself noting that Bakunin raised such concerns in response to Marx - and it is precisely in rejection of Marxist methods that we do propose to abolish the state. However, it is indeed true that if the main action of the anarchist revolution was to 'abolish the state at one stroke' without dealing with all sorts of other concerns, the defeat of the revolution would be pretty near inevitable. Fortunately, though, anarchists have thought quite a bit more deeply than this.

Newman's charge is that the main focus of the anarchist revolution is the destruction of political power. It is ironic that Marxists have frequently accused us of neglecting political power in the revolutionary context - presumably because of a background assumption that immediate destruction

of political power is unthinkable and that the thing to do with it is take it and use it. They think that rejection of political power can only lead to a failure to understand it. Their charge is nonsensical, in some way even more so than Newman, but at least they attempt to find an example to support their case. Their favourite reference is to the Spanish revolution of 1936, when several prominent anarchists accepted high government positions instead of recognizing the Popular Front government as an oppressor and a class enemy. The Marxists like to claim that this step was somehow a consequence of anarchist principles, of 'anarchist misunderstandings of the state' or some such. Of course if anarchists had joined a 'workers' government' controlled by Lenin it would have been a totally different matter! Nonsense. The entry into government was a blatant violation of anarchist principles, and was recognized as such by more committed anarchists both at the time and afterwards. But the Marxist nonsense is really no more nonsensical than Newman's interpretation.

Notice that I refer to the Spanish revolution even though the state was not destroyed, and even though our struggle was ultimately defeated. The point is that revolutions do not consist simply in the destruction of the state. In Spain workers seized factories, peasants took over the land, militias were established for self-defence, and production was at least partly restructured on a basis of mutual aid. Although this happened in a short period (mostly late 1936, after which reactionary forces took the offensive) it was a product of decades of struggle and preparation. Such has been anarchist practice in every revolution where we played a major part: in Ukraine, in Mexico, in Manchuria. Such has been the aim of our practice in the many movements that have never yet come close to revolution. And such is not only our practice but our theory as well. To take just one example, Kropotkin in *The Conquest of Bread* devotes at least as much emphasis to the rebuilding of society and production as to the actual defeat of the oppressor. And we have always emphasised that this rebuilding does not begin with the defeat of the state, but is integral to the way we organise our forces of struggle long before the revolution. The bottom-up, grassroots organisation of these forces, 'controlled by the workers themselves', is intended as the key

antidote to a re-emergence of oppression and domination, of state and class.

Not that we necessarily see revolution as automatically opening the door to a perfect society free from power and domination. On the contrary, Kropotkin notes that we can expect post-revolutionary society to vary considerably in different places; it is fair to assume that some communities will continue to have serious problems. This is confirmed by the fact that Kropotkin does not regard the anarchist revolution as a totally exceptional event. Instead, he regards revolutions as unusual but not utterly anomalous shifts in the general evolution of society. And surely this perspective is borne out by history. Revolutions have happened before, and only the most hidebound end-of-history theorist would suggest that they will not happen again. They are often violent and have many destructive features, but can also have valuable consequences. I do not think many people would want to deny that we are better off for 1789, even if the system that emerged as a result of 1789 is the system we are now fighting against. (This does not mean that we accept the Marxist view that the rise of capitalism was an inevitable and necessary precursor of communism; anarchists are usually not historical determinists; but we can recognise that however terrible capitalism is there were also some important gains for ordinary people in the course of its rise to power. It is simplistic to view 1789 only as a bourgeois revolution.)

Newman might now retort that I have given away too much. What, he might ask, is the point of revolutionary anarchism, without the thesis that human nature is essentially and only co-operative, and without the view that the revolutionary destruction of the state will usher in a perfect society where this nature can be fully realised? And if not for the sake of the perfect society, why are we so determined to destroy the state in the first place? Here he might again throw at us the point, drawn from Foucault, that 'Assemblages such as the State are based on unstable power relations that can just as easily turn against the institution they form the basis of.' But such a reply would be a distortion of the point of anarchism as well as of history in general. Some anarchists have, indeed, made deep metaphysical attacks on the state, or posed the question, 'Why do we need government anyway?' But this

sort of approach, while not without value, is not the core of the anarchist critique. We reject the state because in real life, in history, it is almost always oppressive. If there is metaphysics involved it is in the positive aspect - the view that we can get on without the state - but even there we can be a lot more modest than Newman and other critics like to portray us. Post-ists like to talk dismissively about general theories, and prefer to focus on the particular; but where can Foucault give us an example of the unstable power relations on which the state is based turning against the state. We don't want to say this can never happen, just that it usually doesn't, and that an 'anti-theoretical' or 'particularistic' claim that it does is really just as theoretical and abstract as any of our views.

Let me try to illustrate our view of the state, and many other concerns Newman raises about our struggles, by means of a simple analogy. Many men beat their wives; it is obvious that the wives suffer from this; but many of us would maintain that the men who do this are also degrading themselves, losing out, at least, on what they could gain from a more positive, loving, respectful relationship. It is also well known that many women go along with the abuse, accept it, decline chances to end it, even perhaps encourage it in some ways - in short, they are complicit in it. None of this changes the fact that an end to the abuse is both possible and desirable. We might add that it is desirable for both parties, and that ending it would bring out the better aspects of both their natures; but of course there are many cases when the woman wants to end it but the man, the dominant party, keeps it going - sometimes while promising to end it and perpetually apologising only to start again the next day. In many such cases the only option available to the woman is to leave. And when she leaves her life is not perfect but is a lot better than it was before.

This does not sound like philosophy or deep social theory, and might not earn

the respect of Newman or tons of other theorists. But is humanity not at least approximately divided into powerful oppressors and powerless victims of oppression? Anarchists hold that all, including the rulers, are degraded by this situation; we recognise that the oppressed are often complicit; we also

know that the rulers sometimes apologise and express the intention to improve matters in the future; and yet it goes on. Unfortunately it is not open to the oppressed to pack up and leave the planet; nor can we send our rulers into exile, even if we wanted to give them the chance to inflict themselves on the Martians. The one option open to us is to strive to end their rule, and in the course of this struggle to build the structures for a better world (not a perfect world) and to guard

ourselves against the return of tyranny. And these efforts are born from our actual situation rather than from some abstract subjectivity.

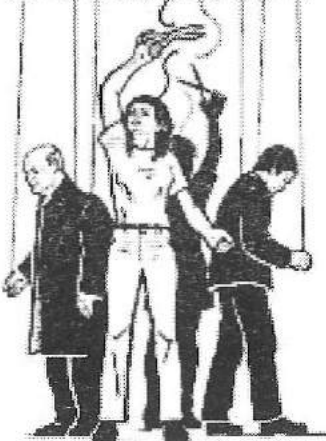
Newman focuses his critique on abstract theories instead of looking at our practice. He fails to recognise the integration between the two; fails also to recognise that anarchists do not claim a leading or vanguard role for theorists, but draw their theories from practice and insist on people's ability to liberate themselves. He talks of 'ressentiment' as an abstract concept, not seeing that we oppose our rulers not out of envy or inferiority complex, but because they are oppressing us and we would be better off without them. So he insists that we turn away from revolution because he doesn't see what we mean by it, because it's dangerous and because it can't deliver something we don't generally expect it to deliver. He then makes some obscure comments about 'eternal return' - the one point at which I totally failed to see what he was getting at, though perhaps this could be remedied - before attempting to make some positive suggestions. He urges us to

'envisage a form of political community or collective identity that [does] not restrict difference' - as if we hadn't been doing that all along! (Compare Kropotkin's insistence on the diversity of post-revolutionary society.) Maybe there are specific points he has in mind in terms of extending our approach to such matters; but then he should give details. I do not think even this opening is available in the case of his call for the 'construction of new forms of collective action and identities'. Nothing has been more central to anarchist theory and practice since the time of Bakunin. We are constantly debating and experimenting with many different forms of organisation, both in struggle and for mutual aid for our immediate needs. I do not know of any other movement that has been as innovative in this area. So after asking us to throw out a central aspect of our practice, Newman advocates another central aspect as if it was something new.

In calling himself a post-anarchist, Newman seems to identify anarchism as something like his intellectual grandmother. But he is not content only to teach his grandmother to suck eggs. Without taking any note of what she's been saying and doing for over a hundred years, he walks up to her and says, 'Granny, you're obviously suffering from the illusion that the yolks of these eggs are made of gold. This is why you've been going around smashing them. Now I may at some point give you some suggestions on how to suck eggs; but for now remember that, not only is the yolk not made of gold, but you'll never get to it anyway; all you can do is suck the white.' Admittedly this is not as bad as those who accuse Granny of trying to eat the shell and throw the yolk away, or those who say the eggs are all empty anyway; but that is the kind of help

Newman is offering. All Granny can do is go on sucking eggs, welcome any genuinely constructive suggestions, and perhaps take a little time to contemplate whether this sort of approach may be all that 'post-ism' has to offer.

Let's cut ourselves free
from
AUTHORITY



Anarchy in Southern Africa

First, perhaps you could say something about yourself and the organisation you are part of?

This interview was done with Sh. And St. of the Durban-based Zabalaza Action Group (ZAG), Jonathan Payn of the regional Anarchist Black Cross (ABC), who is the ZACF acting regional secretary, and Michael Schmidt of the Johannesburg-based Bikisha Media Collective (BMC) who is the ZACF acting international secretary. Joe and Sh. Are also involved with Zabalaza Books (ZB), while Michael is also involved with the ABC. The collectives we are members of are among the founding collectives of the ZACF. Some of them, like ZB, originated as underground collectives a decade ago in the twilight of apartheid.

Does it involve blacks and whites? What class/social background is the typical member?

The Federation's groups are made up of both blacks and whites who are majority Working Class, some of whom are unemployed or students. Current membership is pretty equally divided between black and white, but there are far more black people living in "squatter camps" and townships who have expressed a genuine interest in anarchism than white people living in suburbs. A typical member would be in their early 20s, casually employed and male. We expect female membership to climb as our community projects prove their worth and also hope to attract indigenous*, Asian and coloured activists. (NB: "indigenous" refers to Bushmen, Griquas, Khoekhoen and other self-described "yellow" First Peoples who lived in SA before black people arrived).

Has there been much of an African Anarchist tradition/movement?

Long under the whip of hyper-extractive colonial regimes, the development of the entire spectrum of left-wing revolutionism in Africa has been slaved firstly to the late or very narrow development of an industrial working class in a handful of countries - and secondly to the development of national liberation struggles. In the first

case, it was only countries such as South Africa, Algeria and Egypt where colonialism established significant settler populations (many of them labourers from Europe, or indentured labourers from India and Asia) to run sophisticated economies based on mining, commercial agriculture and their associated infrastructure. It is no accident that it is in these countries that anarchism first gained a foothold more than a century ago, finding its highest expression in the IWW-influenced revolutionary syndicalism of the Industrial Workers of Africa (IWA, founded 1917) and of the Indian Workers Industrial Union (IWIU, founded 1919) in South Africa.

A notable exception to the trend is in

thereafter. Secondly, from the early 1930s, much of Africa started to fall under fascism: Mozambique, Angola and other Portuguese territories under Salazar's regime after 1927; Libya, Ethiopia and Eritrea under Mussolini in the late 1930s; Morocco and Spanish Sahara under Franco's Spain from 1936; Algeria, French West Africa and Madagascar under Vichy France during the war; and Belgian Central Africa under Rexist Belgium during the war.

The post-war acceleration of national liberation struggles thus took place in an anarchist vacuum - but in a condition of largely Soviet or Maoist seduction and patronage, while parts of Africa remained under fascist control into the mid-1970s (Angola and

Mozambique). In the 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the winding down of several struggles (notably against apartheid), anarchism resurfaced in the revolutionary syndicalist IWW of Sierra Leone, the anarcho-syndicalist Awareness League (AL) of Nigeria, the anarchist movements that lead to

The greatest popular interest we experience in the poor communities where we work (and where many of us live) is not so much in the expression of anarchist (anti-)politics, but in its practical application . . . To put it simply: our practice is our strength and our attraction

the then-Portuguese colony of Mozambique, where it appears that an anarcho-syndicalist trade union federation allied to the powerful Portuguese General Confederation of Labour (CGT) flourished into the late 1920s in the complete absence of a domestic communist party. The situation in the other main Portuguese colony of Angola is likely to have been similar (a possible contributing factor to the choice of a red-and-black post-colonial flag?), but this is an unstudied history.

Two factors contributed to the decay of the "first wave" of revolutionary syndicalism & anarcho-syndicalism in Africa. Firstly, as with other Anglophone countries (former British colonies), the lack of a specific anarchist organisation crippled revolutionary syndicalist organisations in meeting the challenges of Bolshevism and of emergent petit-bourgeois black nationalism (the ANC for instance), so the Industrial and Commercial Union (ICU, founded 1921) that the IWA and IWIU gave birth to spread as far afield as Zambia and peaked in 1927, but collapsed in ideological confusion

the formation of the Workers' Solidarity Federation (WSF) in South Africa, and more recently, the Anarchist and Workers Solidarity Movement (AWSM) of Zambia, anarcho-syndicalist networks in Morocco and Burkina Faso, the Anti-Capitalist Convergence of Kenya (ACCK) that was started by anarchists and socialists, and the ZACF that followed on from the WSF.

What did you think of the book "African anarchism" by Sam Mbah and I.E. Igariwey? Do you think that is a good starting place to find out more about African Anarchism and its history?

The book is good in describing the anarchic elements of some traditional African societies that existed before colonisation, and is a good starting point but is limited because the anarchist movement has only really resurfaced in Africa (with the exception of the Awareness League) just prior to the book being published, and the socio-political climate has changed quite dramatically across the continent since then. The collapse of apartheid and the

end that brought to cross-border conflicts in Namibia, Angola and Mozambique in particular, the defeat of the old US client regimes like the former Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) and proxy forces (like UNITA in Angola), and the exit of dictators like Daniel Arap Moi of Kenya and Hastings Banda of Malawi has brought the Cold War in Africa to an end.

But the raping of the DRC by transnational corporations, under the cover of military conflict between nine countries, the exposure of the fraud of electoral politics through the corruption of new "democratic" regimes like that of Frederic Chiluba of Zambia, and the last-ditch scorched-earth stance of "socialist" dinosaurs like Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe have kept tensions high. Adding to this is the smooth sub-imperialism of South Africa's Thabo Mbeki and his neo-liberal "New Partnership for Africa's Development" (NEPAD) that has ushered in a whole new era of struggle on the continent. The greatest strength of the book "African Anarchism" was its critique of the monster that was African socialism and of the current obstacles - and opportunities - presented for the development of anarchism by the thug rule and chaos that is governance and business on the continent. Its greatest weaknesses are, however: firstly an exaggerated over-emphasis on the libertarian traditions of some tribes which makes it seem to look in a primitivist direction for its anarchist inspiration (seemingly because of a lack of knowledge about syndicalist antecedents); and secondly a lack of a proper analysis of and description of at least the Awareness League itself, if not of other current African anarchist movements where its knowledge is understandably more slender.

Is there much interest in Anarchism in Southern Africa? Has this been reflected in the size and influence of your organisation?

There has definitely been a growing interest in anarchism in Southern Africa recently, but this has not yet been reflected in the size of the ZACF which is still in its embryonic stage. However, we are more concerned with spreading anarchist ideas and practices than building an organisation. The approach the ZACF has taken towards membership is that it recruits on a by-invitation-only basis those we have worked with for probably at least a year within the social movements, those we know are convinced and active anarchists.

This is a totally different approach to the old WSF's open-door "if you're interested, you're in" policy that contributed to its ideological and practical weakness. The greatest popular interest we experience in the poor communities where we work (and where many of us live) is not so much in the expression of anarchist (anti-)politics, but in its practical application: non-sectarian, horizontal, directly democratic community projects like food gardens and book-and-tool lending libraries. To put it simply: our practice is our strength and our attraction. But as an organisation, we remain a tiny, if very active, player in the radical and progressive social movements that sprang up in around 2000.

Has the failure of African authoritarian socialism played a role in rise of the interest in Anarchism? Or did the collapse of Stalinism in Eastern Europe play a greater role? Or was it a case of better politics coming out on top?

The concept of "African socialism" as defined by continental so-called liberation leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Amílcar Cabral, Agostinho Neto, Eduardo Mondlane, Ahmed Ben Bella and others (including interested outsiders like Frantz Fanon) has been hugely influential in the mal-development of the continent, both ideologically and economically. Some post-liberation countries experimented initially with a form of statist decentralisation, notably Libya under Muammar Gaddafi and Tanzania under Nyerere while on the opposite side of the spectrum were the hyper-authoritarian Marxist regimes of the likes of Mengistu Haile Mariam's Ethiopia or the outright neo-fascism of Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt. The primary external "socialist" influences (based

on direct military/political/economic investment) were the old USSR and to a lesser extent Cuba, China, North Korea and East Germany. The collapse of the Soviet Bloc had a big impact on the sustainability of the facade of "socialism" across much of the continent. Some regimes, like that of Mengistu, have collapsed. Others like Frelimo in Mozambique, have transformed themselves into bourgeois-democratic regimes. Still others like Zambia under Chiluba have capitulated wholesale to neo-liberalism. The evaporation of funding from foreign "communist" states was instrumental in provoking the collapse of unsustainable African "socialism".

Lacking sustained anarchist/libertarian/



we find that people respect those who take initiative, work hard, stand by their promises and fight for the rights of others. It is on this basis alone that we have any audience at all



syndicalist mass organised traditions, the continent has not proven a rich environment for the revival of anti-authoritarian organisations. Where they have arisen, it has perhaps been only in part because of the ideological vacuum created by the collapse of the validity of "socialism", and perhaps more because of specific local conditions: in Sierra Leone, it was the pitiful working conditions in the diamond mines that gave rise to the IWW section there; while in Nigeria, leftist opposition to military rule helped forge the Awareness League. In South Africa, the legitimacy crisis of the reformist SA Communist Party (SACP) and the erosion of worker gains by neo-liberalism have helped spur some interest in anarchism. But levels of interest and involvement in anarchism on the continent are extremely low (by comparison to Latin America or Eastern Europe, for example) and should not be overemphasised. The "best politics" has yet to even gain a significant foothold, let alone "come out on top".

How does the 'liberated' South Africa look now? Has the ending of Apartheid seen any major changes?

There are significant structural, legal, economic, political and social changes - but also a widening wealth gap that for many black inhabitants means very little has changed in real terms. The scattered black homelands and their duplicate bureaucracies (including their armed forces) have been consolidated into a unitary state. A new human-rights-based constitution and the scrapping of all overt racially discriminatory laws has established a bourgeois parliamentary democracy in which the ANC is by far the dominant party with a 2/3 majority that they hope to consolidate in this year's general election. Less overt racial laws, those that are class-based and biased in favour of big business, have, however ensured that the black majority remains landless, impoverished tenants in their own country.

The country's protectionist economics - reinforced by sanctions isolation - has been replaced by an open-door policy that has allowed cheap imports to flood the country, leading to the loss of some 1-million jobs since 1994. Probably the hardest-hit is the clothing manufacturing sector that has long been a stronghold of workerist organising, as well as organised agriculture. Wildcat strikes have been most marked in the motor manufacturing sector, and in the late 1990s there were a spate of blockades

of arterial roads by radicals in the transport sector. Labour battles between progressive and reactionary unions lead to a few murders in the ports and mining sectors.

Unemployment stands at perhaps 40%, but we will discuss labour in more detail later. While the laws dividing people along colour lines have changed, inequality and the wealth gap are increasing. Some 75% of all SA homes lack food security and one can find children suffering from malnutrition-related diseases like marasmus and kwashiorkor on the doorsteps of our cities. HIV/AIDS has taken a huge toll and thousands of child orphans now find themselves the heads of their households, caring for their infant siblings as best they can. Some 62% of all blacks, 29% of all coloureds, 11% of all Asians and 4% of all whites currently live below the poverty line, a dramatic increase during the "decade of democracy". Some 3.5-million have been evicted from their homes since 1994, often at gunpoint, while millions more have had their water and electricity cut off by municipalities who are far more interested in cost-recovery than the health of their residents.

Many black people have commented on how life under the old apartheid regime was in some ways better in that there was more job security and there were state subsidies in services, which have been eroded by the neo-liberal GEAR (Growth Employment And Redistribution) economic policy of the ANC, which is a home-grown structural adjustment programme that even surprised the IMF and World Bank with its austerity. The racist white ultra-right has gone into a significant decline following the failed pre-1994 election Afrikaner Resistance Movement (AWB) invasion of the Bophuthatswana bantustan and the last-gasp election bombing campaign. The current treason trial against the Farmer Force (Boeremag) is demonstrating how weak and pathetic the white right is, despite grandiose plans of blowing up dams and seizing control of the armed forces - all of which came to naught.

Still, racism is a deeply entrenched reality in many farming areas where black labourers have been murdered, tortured or shot at, often for the mildest of supposed infractions. On the other hand, studies have shown that most murders of white farmers are criminally and not politically motivated. Right-wing vitilantism and murder has become a problem, both with the black/white

Spots of the Leopard (Mapogo a Matamaga) organisation in the northern provinces and the PAGAD Muslim/criminal organisation in the Western Cape, but both seem to be pretty quiet now. The main thing to recognise is that the mainstream right-wingers, both white and black, are now all in parliament. And not a single parliamentary party is opposed to neo-liberalism. So for many black, coloured, Asian and indigenous South Africans, their historical experience of marginalisation, joblessness, poverty, malnutrition and racism is unchanged, perhaps even deepened.

The ANC has been the government for a while now. What are they up to? Have they played the same role as Blair's "New Labour" in introducing neo-liberal reforms under a "socialist" label?

You have hit the nail on the head. The ANC remains a member of the Socialist International - yet President Thabo Mbeki is a self-described Thatcherite. The ANC still talks at its public rallies of its "national democratic revolution" - and in the boardrooms about market fundamentalism. It has fired on peaceful demonstrations at home - and cosied up to noxious dictators like Gadaffi, Suharto, Mugabe, Musharraf, Kabila and Castro abroad. These contradictions are supposedly resolved by what the ANC claims is a "developmental state" theory. Now clearly, the party has to deal with the basic provision of infrastructural services in order to do three things: encourage foreign direct investment; secure their voter base; and improve the overall skills levels of the black working class so as to ensure a significantly large domestic market and a skills base to enable manufacturing to take the economic lead from primary industries like mining, agriculture and fishing.

The ANC leadership has embraced the neo-liberalism that has meant stupendous wealth for some 300 black dynasties-in-the-making, the 5% of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange that represents "black empowerment". It was mid-way through former President Nelson Mandela's term that the ANC shut down its quasi-socialist pretensions (the Redistribution and Development Programme, RDP) and instead wholeheartedly embraced GEAR. It is important to recognise that the ANC does not rule alone (a common misconception abroad, we find), but in cahoots with the Zulu chauvanist Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the anti-

communist Pan Africanist Congress (PAC). In the Western Cape at provincial level, it has even been in bed with the retread New National Party (the old apartheid government). These alliances of convenience have tilted the overall political balance of the ruling clique in the direction of centre-right, which is despicable, given the decades of socialist rhetoric that motivated millions of South Africans (and their foreign allies) to back the "liberation" movements against apartheid. Today, the ANC is a blatant capitalist party (although like Lula in Brazil and Chavez in Venezuela, it talks left while acting right). As mentioned above, they have introduced GEAR, which calls for cuts in social spending, privatisation, the casualisation of labour etc. With the socialist rhetoric of the past discarded, the ANC is revealed to be true to its original class interest: it is the party of an emerging bourgeoisie, of chieftains and technocrats from the black middle class who wanted to have a bigger slice of the capitalist pie.

And what about the Communist Party? What is their role?

The Communist Party alongside COSATU - which is the biggest trade union organisation in South Africa - is in an alliance with the ruling ANC, the Tripartite Alliance. The SACP basically toes the ANC party line and uses their influence to gain votes for the ruling party, and in return high-ranking SACP party officials have seats in government. The rank and file of the SACP is pretty inactive with many members abandoning the party to join the social movements and other members who don't like the direction the party is taking being expelled. The role of SACP in its own view is to provide a "critical socialist engagement" with the ANC regime, but its critics say its real role is to provide "red cover" for the ANC's anti-working class policies. On the other hand, despite the fact that key ministers are communists - police (which glories under the name Safety & Security, SS), public works, public enterprises, the office of the presidency, water affairs & forestry - the SACP clearly is a subservient organisation. This was shown by the ANC forcing SACP deputy general secretary Jeremy Cronin to apologise for warning about the possible "Zanufication" of the ruling congress, meaning it was stating to take on the dictatorial attitudes of Mugabe's ZANU-PF party. We characterised the spat as one between "Cronin capitalism and crony capitalism"!

Cronin himself, a loyal Stalinist (and doesn't Stalinism and Thatcherism go well together?) booted a real Bolshevik, Dale McKinley, out of the SACP for, essentially being too communist. McKinley is today spokesman for the Social Movements Indaba, the umbrella of the social movements within which the ZACF works.

With the end of Apartheid and an ANC government, how is the Trade Union movement shaping up? Are they fighting for their members or agreeing to "modernisation"?

As mentioned above, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) is in alliance with the ruling party. Although it is the most progressive of the four big labour federations, it no longer fights for the interests of the rank-and-file; instead of organising workers for struggle they prefer to negotiate with bosses behind closed doors. Like the SACP, the high-ranking COSATU officials are also using their positions to get comfortable seats in government and to canvas for the ANC. With the fall of apartheid workers on the shop floor have been dissuaded from taking militant action, and a once strong fighting union has become a lapdog for the ruling elite. One of the main compromises made by COSATU is its endorsement of a Labour Relations Act that, while supposedly guaranteeing more labour rights, in fact places so many mediation obligations before aggrieved workers that it is extremely difficult to embark on a legal strike. Also, CCOSATU is party to NEDLAC, a cross-class labour/government/business policy forum that tends to lock it into agreements with the ruling class. Then there is the growing practice of organised labour investing in capitalist companies or investment schemes, leading to possible conflict of



the most important lesson is to put your muscle where your mouth is. We have to be directly involved in all radical and progressive grassroots movements

interest problems if labour disputes arise at the companies invested in.

In addition to this, the forced amalgamation of COSATU's more radical and powerful unions (chemical, and transport in particular) with defunct and backward ones (paper & pulp, and another transport outfit, respectively) created mega-unions on paper, but diluted the radicalism and effectiveness of these progressive redoubts of organised labour. This, combined with the erosion of internal democracy by the imposition of "democratic centralism" to silence comment from the floor, the expulsion of revolutionary leaders and shop-stewards and the bugging of union offices by suspected ANC internal intelligence agents have neutered the power of COSATU. This also led to an anarchist change of tactics away from the anarcho-syndicalism represented by the Workers' Solidarity Federation (WSF), that we shut down in 1999 in order to reorient ourselves more towards building serious militants outside the compromised unions. That said, it was the opposition to privatisation by the SA

Municipal Workers Union (a COSATU affiliate) that helped spark the new wave of resistance to capitalism. The unions may be hamstrung at the moment, but the bite of neo-liberalism is taking its toll on the shop-floor just as much as in the township streets, so we believe it is only a matter of time before they experience a resurgence of rank-and-file militancy.

What about Trotskyist groups? Are they an issue? What relationship do they have to the popular struggles and to your organisation?

As was the case in Brazil, France and elsewhere, the first "communist party" in SA - the one that refused to accept Lenin's 21 conditions - was founded by anarchists and syndicalists. The second, Bolshevik party named the Communist Party of South Africa - Communist International (CPSA-CI) - today's SACP - followed the global trend in the late 1920s by purging itself of all its libertarians. In SA's case, most of those who were purged became Trots, including the former anarchist Thomas Thibedi. Trot groups have ever since maintained a continuous - if fractious - presence in the Western Cape in particular and Johannesburg to a lesser extent. Today, there are something like nine different Trot factions: put three Trots in a room for a day and you have a new international; leave them there for a week, and you'll have three different internationals! Seriously, though, they form the largest part of the non-SACP Left (excluding the African socialists), followed by anarchists, then autonomists and lastly a few very secretive Maoists (we won't even speak about that nutty Spartacist cult!). Unfortunately, certain individual Trots carry quite a lot of influence within the new social movements and have recently attempted to get the social movements embroiled in the upcoming elections (a tiny outfit called Keep Left wanted members to vote ANC "because that's where the working class is"!)- but this was strongly opposed by anarchists, autonomists and even some Trots and the odd Bolshevik who thought it premature to try and turn the social movements into a political party. Others have tried to take credit for work that we anarchists have done. One such example is of a group who took photographs of a ZACF community library and vegetable garden and then allegedly tried to use them in their name to secure funding from overseas.

What are the current important issues and campaigns in Southern African?

Can you tell us more about, say, the anti-eviction, anti-water privatisation and anti-electricity cut-off campaigns?

In about 2000, several new anti-neo-liberal resistance strands (those opposing the payment of apartheid foreign debt, or the privatisation of municipal water, for example) united to form a constellation of new radical and progressive social movements. After holding the fort for several years in a political wilderness where criticism of the ANC/SACP was virtually unheard of (maintaining a propaganda initiative and running the Workers Library & Museum in Johannesburg as an independent working class space), the anarchist movement got directly involved in the new social movements, helping found the Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg.

Today the movements embrace an estimated 200 000 supporters across SA - as compared to the SA Communist Party's largely inactive 16 000 paper membership. It must also be pointed out that it was our comrade B and the late comrade Mandla of the ZACF collective, the Shesha Action Group (SAG) in Soweto who started Operation Khanyisa, meaning "light", the operation that illegally re-connected some 25000 homes in Soweto. These "guerrilla electricians" are literally heroes to the millions of poor people who have had their lights cut off by state power supplier Eskom since 1994. In the Western Cape there has been an ongoing struggle against evictions since about 1998, when banks began to repossess houses that they had sold to poor communities. They then try selling them back, either to their original owners or to others, at a higher price. In addition to this there have also been private-public partnerships set up by the government to collect debts for the banks. On the other hand poor communities are struggling to put food on their tables let alone repay debts to the banks for houses that have already been paid for. This led to the formation of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign, which has affiliates across the Western Cape/ Cape Flats.

The fight against water privatisation has recently taken off in Phiri, Soweto, which is being used as a testing ground to see how successful the installation of pre-paid water meters will be, before installing the meters in other communities. This has led to the formation of the Anti Pre-Paid Water Coalition, which is made up of various activist groups and individuals

involved in the struggle against privatisation in general. Namely amongst others the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF) and the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC).

What tactics and strategy do they use?

In general there is a tendency to use both legal means and direct action means. On the legal front, the movements take the companies, councillors etc. responsible for, for example; evictions in the Western Cape or electricity cut-offs in Gauteng, to court. The biggest success so far of this tactic is the reversal of the government's attitude towards the provision of anti-retroviral drugs following a sustained court battle with the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC). The social movements also do research and try to bolster public support via marches, demonstrations and media blitzes. More importantly, they also take direct action, which has proven far more effective both in delaying or stopping evictions, cut-offs etc. as well as in building public support for the social movements.

In areas of the Western Cape the Anti-Eviction Campaign (AEC) has successfully resisted evictions by anticipating when they are going to take place and then burning barricades, physically defending their homes and chasing the sheriffs of the court. In Gauteng, where there has been a massive number of electricity and water cut-offs because people have not been able to pay their arrears, there have been campaigns by the SECC and APF and others, including anarchists, to literally go door-to-door illegally reconnecting thousands of households electricity and water. Unfortunately, because the workers responsible for installing pre-paid water and electricity metres are always guarded by heavily-armed private security contractors the campaigns have not been successful in stopping the installations altogether. These tactics have of course led to increased state and capitalist repression and the toll is weighing heavily on the social movements in terms of having to find money to post bail, pay lawyers etc, a task for which the ABC and its project, the Anti-Repression Network (ARN) was set up in August 2002.

Does the legacy of Apartheid impact on the spread of anarchist ideas or collective struggle? Does racism hinder the development of class movements? Are there any problems with ethnic divisions (Zulu, Xhosa,

etc.)? How do you combat these divides?

Apartheid has definitely had an impact on the spread of anarchist ideas in that for so long the majority of people in SA only had access to a limited "Bantu education", which has created high levels of illiteracy and the availability of anarchist material was very scarce even to those who could read. However, after the fall of apartheid and, with it, the 'Suppression of Communism Act' as well as the rise in access to information and availability of anarchist materials, it is a lot easier and safer to spread and implement anarchist ideas. The problem of illiteracy still exists (mostly amongst the older generations) as well as there being a lack of anarchist materials available in the indigenous languages of SA.

Regarding the issue of racism, there has been a definite decline in racism in general with people of all "race" and "ethnic" groups being involved in the new social movements, but there are still lingering ethnic tensions and an increasing level of xenophobia against immigrants from other African countries, which is being fuelled by state and corporate media propaganda in attempts to divide us along new lines and scapegoat sections of the working class for the problems whose root lies at the doors of capital and state. One way to combat this is, during conversations, to challenge people when we hear racist or xenophobic remarks and try show them the roots of these prejudices and how working and poor people have more in common with each other, whoever they are, no matter their place of origin or skin colour, than they do with any person of a higher class who may have the same skin colour or place of origin. Another way is through participating in educational workshops that, for example, use economic policies such as NEPAD to show or highlight the ways that people across the continent are faced with the same neo-liberal onslaught and use

these opportunities to promote class-consciousness and internationalism.

What are the current political discussions are they having? How do they differ from, say, those in the West? Are they linked to any political parties?

Recently there has been discussion as to whether or not the Anti-Privatisation Forum in Johannesburg should participate in the upcoming elections, as was suggested by the Trotskyist leadership. Last year the APF held a four-day long

provincial) and were able to attract a rather large amount of support from other affiliates although the majority proposed a spoilt vote. There are a lot of "political parties" involved, but all are extra-parliamentary (many only because of their small support base, not because of any principled opposition to bourgeois political forums). Some are African socialist, some Trotskyist, some even tactically support the ANC (including the Trotskyist "Keep Left") and others are unaligned working class community organisations, whether progressive or conservative.

Our social movements probably differ from those in the global North in that our focus is on how we combat the effects of living under neo-colonialism (rather than how to prevent its export, though opposition to NEPAD is growing in importance). Issues such as 'womanise', environmental, unionist and gay rights have so far not yet fully integrated with the mainstream movements whose focus is largely anti-privatisation, anti-neo-liberalism, anti-militarism, anti-repression and anti-debt - and in favour of community control, freedom of speech and association, radical land redistribution, free water and lights and housing and farm labourer's rights. But there are international links between, for instance, the Landless People's Movement (LPM) and the Landless Movement (MST) in Brazil, with which our Brazilian anarchist comrades in the FAG for instance engage at grassroots level.



Today, the ANC is a blatant capitalist party (although like Lula in Brazil and Chavez in Venezuela, it talks left while acting right).



The conflict is between the genuine mass anarchist tradition and the pale, atomistic liberal fakes that masquerade as anarchist in much of the Anglophone world.

elections workshop with all its affiliates to debate the pros and cons of participation. Initially certain people proposed to turn the APF into a political party which would run in both National and Local elections, but as one might have expected, this led to internal bickering amongst the Trot leadership as to whether or not it was the right time to form a new "workers' party" and in the end it was decided - by them - only to run in the provincial (Gauteng) election. This was opposed outright by the anarchists and other libertarians present who argued for a boycott of the election altogether (national and

How does your organisation take part and influence these movements and the unions? What role are anarchists and/or anarchist ideas playing in them? Do your ideas find an audience?

Members of our organisation participate in these movements on the ground in the form of direct action as well as arguing for anarchist alternatives and ways of organising within the social movements. Having previously had anarchists involved in the media committee of the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), we have now abandoned those positions in order to involve ourselves more with the base of the

movements, particularly in the townships and the inner cities. This has to a certain extent decreased our "official" visibility although anarchist principles are still being put forward both within the communities from where the social movements draw their base as well as when we participate in workshops organised for the social movements. This has also resulted in accusations from the mostly Trot leadership that we are not involved in struggles but simply "parachute in" when it suits us. But we make no apologies for not being movement "leaders" and focusing our energies instead on our own social projects: the ARN, our township community libraries and food gardens, and the syndicalist Workers' Council. The latter, a Durban-based ZAG project, is our only direct organisational engagement in the union environment, but other ZACF members are also involved in the cleaning workers' struggle at Wits University for instance, while others are fighting relatively lonely battles in mainstream unions.

Generally, we find that people respect those who take initiative, work hard, stand by their promises and fight for the rights of others. It is on this basis alone that we have any audience at all. But it is a small audience standing against a high tide of the neo-liberal attrition of worker rights, both blue- and white-collar.

What have you learned from your participation in such struggles and organisations?

Clearly, the most important lesson is to put your muscle where your mouth is. We have to be directly involved in all radical and progressive grassroots movements. Secondly and encouragingly, the appearance of self-described anarchist groups in the black townships and squatter camps - initially totally without our input or influence - is an exciting validation of the attractiveness of anarchist ideas, even where no materials are available and no tradition exists! Thirdly, that these anarchists who directly experience repression and exploitation are themselves incredibly innovative, and have devised forms of struggle, service and organisation (without any prior knowledge) that are widely used and respected by anarchists, libertarians and syndicalists across the world, a further validation of the global movement's ethics, ideas and practices. Fourthly, that it is out of these auto-convened anarchist organisations, built by and for the poorest of

the poor, that a genuinely fresh, libertarian revolutionary movement will emerge. Lastly, we learned to be aware of opportunists and people using the social movements for their own ends (and to recognise that our own interactions could lead to patronage and political control if we were not careful to defend the autonomy of these groups). Oh, and of course, never trust a Trot!

What aspect of anarchism have you found most useful in practice?

The most useful practical aspect of anarchism is its universal appeal to the hearts and minds of positive-thinking people, regardless of their ethnic, political or cultural origins. Our social projects are deliberately non-sectarian, provided you play according to libertarian principles, you can participate, and if you participate, you benefit. The practical mutual aid displayed by these projects tackles head-on, with vigour and enthusiasm one of the greatest plagues afflicting the working class in SA: a sense of hopelessness and dependency. The ethic of anarchism gives community members purpose and class pride, showing them that they can achieve great things - if only they listen, help, share and co-operate with their neighbours. Finally, mutual aid is strengthened by egalitarian decision-making that teaches people to be tough and flexible at the same time. All this gives anarchism and our projects an appeal that has even intrigued and delighted conservatives in the communities. Our first garden & library project has already been featured in a Canadian film on water rights in South Africa and has attracted a volunteer youth group which helps out at weekends. The ability of anarchism to transcend the ghetto/museum that anarchists themselves have kept it in for so long is inspiring!

Where in Africa is your influence particularly strong? How do you spread the message?

As an organisation we are only active in South Africa, which is therefore obviously where our influence lies, concentrated in the cities and townships of Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. We have recently established contact and begun to develop a relationship with comrades from the Swaziland Youth Congress (SWAYOCO) who although influenced by Marxist/ Leninist ideas (all they have been exposed to) are very interested in anarchism and are keen to work together and learn more about our

organisation and our politics. In this case we spread the message through travelling to the region to make direct contact with interested comrades, giving them literature to read and engaging in political discussion in an attempt to influence their struggles in an anarchist direction i.e. pushing their pro-democracy struggle forward so that they have more revolutionary aims than simply substituting a monarchy with another form of government.

Other than that, we know our materials have proven influential in establishing the Anti-Capitalist Convergence Kenya (ACKK) and in initiating a group in Uganda. We have no idea what influence we have in Zambia following the collapse of the AWSM, with the AL in Nigeria, or with the leftist rebel forces in southern Sudan who approached us for information about anarchism.

We have several propaganda avenues: our theoretical journal "Zabalaza" (Struggle) is aimed at an activist readership, while the ABC's "Black Alert" is the voice of its Anti-Repression Network (ARN) and is aimed at a social movement readership; then there are our ZB and BMC pamphlets which are both sold via the Workers' Library & Museum in Johannesburg and available in downloadable form for free over our Zabalaza website (<http://www.zabalaza.net>) which is a propaganda tool in its own right and boasts an interactive forum to which we encourage Black Flag readers to contribute; then there is the anarchy_africa e-mail discussion & news list which is open to all interested people around the world; and finally our Red & Black Fora, which are workshops for anarchists, and other libertarians. We obviously have a presence on all major marches as well, and post news to the autonomist-run Indymedia SA, but our best propaganda is still our social projects like food gardens and community libraries.

Are the issues of Southern Africa similar to those in the rest of the continent? What is the situation facing the continent in general?

South Africa has a very specific condition that makes it distinct from the rest of Africa. As the continent's most powerful economy, it is also its most important sub-imperialist power, acting as a sort of regional policeman and continental viceroyalty on behalf of British imperialism. The distinction of the UK as our imperial power is as important - and neglected - as the

recognition that Brazil is the sub-imperialist power in Latin America, operating on behalf of US interests. Remember, even if the UK is junior to the US, post-colonial Britain continues to dominate relations in Anglophone Africa, which include four key regional economies: Egypt in the north, Nigeria in the west, Kenya in the east and South Africa in the south. The only other imperialist power that wields quite as much influence in Africa is France, but France had only one key regional economy, Algeria, and lost much control there after "liberation", leaving it with the purely extractive raw material / cheap labour pools of the Francophone west.

As the main continental sub-imperialist power, post-apartheid SA has: pushed the neo-liberal New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); restructured the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) as the neo-liberal African Union (AU); invaded its neighbour Lesotho in 1998 to falsely "restore democracy" (i.e.: crush a pro-democratic mutiny and claim it was a coup attempt); hugely expanded its own multinationals like Anglo American into the interior, often as buy-ins to privatisation; and advanced exploitation by, for instance, enclosing huge areas of northern Mozambique by pushing peasants off the land and settling white racist commercial farmers there. SA's infrastructure, economy - and armed forces - make it a formidable capital adversary to the working classes of our neighbours north of the Limpopo River. So the SA situation is intimately tied to being in the sub-imperialist centre on the one hand - and on the other to having a large industrialised working class with a very recent insurrectionary history.

The class in SA also has an appreciation of the promises of communist liberation fresh in its memory - while it stares down the barrel of ANC-driven neo-liberalism. Otherwise, the wars in central Africa (DRC and southern Sudan in particular) are winding down, while West African regions like Sierra Leone (where until destroyed by the civil war, there was until recently a 3 000-strong IWW section) and Liberia continue to bleed. Still, the DRC "peace" deal has foolishly endorsed rule-by-the-gun by simply recognising all combatants as legitimate claimants to a slice of the pie. This, the continuing attracting of plundering countries like Angola and the DRC of diamond and oil wealth by foreign (and African)

multinationals, and the continued presence of interahamwe Hutu militia in the Great Lakes region make it appear that central instability is likely to continue for some time. And when the guns fall silent, there is still class rule, so no true peace. There is only one remaining colony - Western Sahara, which remains under Moroccan occupation - so the dynamics of national liberation are long faded. Essentially, we all face the same neo-liberal enemy today, but many of our neighbours do it without basic human rights, infrastructure, the means of living beyond a Medieval average age of 40 - and without any libertarian revolutionary tradition within living memory.

What links do you have with other libertarians? In Africa? Worldwide?

In Africa we have had intermittent contact with the Awareness League in Nigeria although this is hard to maintain, as is the case throughout the third world, due to the lack of access to communication. We have also recently established contact with the ACK in Kenya and anarchists in Uganda as well as members of the SWAYOCO in Swaziland. Internationally the ZACF is a member of the International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS) network and has links with other ILS affiliates across Latin America, North America, Europe and the former USSR.

Historically, our closest international links have been with the Workers Solidarity Movement (WSM) of Ireland, with the Swedish Workers Central Organisation (SAC), with both the CNT-AIT, the CNT-Vignoles and the Francophone Anarchist Federation in France and the CGT in Spain. In recent years, closer ties have been established, often via the ILS, with the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC) of the USA/Canada, the Anarchist Communist Federation (FdCA) in Italy, Rebel (Auca) of Argentina, the Gaucha Anarchist Federation (FAG) and their associates in Brazil, Tinku Youth of Bolivia, the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation (FAU) and the CIPO-RFM of Mexico. We are in contact with the Cuban Libertarian Movement in Exile (MLCE) in Mexico and in France, with the Iranian underground and the Iraqi exile movement - and with numerous other organisations - including ABCs - spanning the globe from Costa Rica to New Zealand, from Chile to Russia.

What do you make of the discussions

in overseas anarchist groups?

There is a clear growing maturity in the analysis and debate emerging from the global anarchist movement. No longer do we hear so much the old sub-cultural "smash the state" sloganeering. In particular, we believe, must be commended the in-depth analytical work of relatively new organisations in Latin America like the CIPO-RFM of Mexico, the Gaucha Anarchist Federation (FAG), Cabocla Anarchist Federation (FACA) and Insurrectionary Anarchist Federation (FAI) of Brazil, Tinku Youth (TJ) of Bolivia and the Libertarian Socialist Organisation (OSL) and Rebel (Auca) of Argentina. Their reaction to the collapse of the IMF/World Bank "golden boy" economy of Argentina in particular has been hugely refreshing - probably because it is based on sound community activism. Their bruising critique of the fake-left dream of Lula's Brazil, Chavez's Venezuela and of course Castro's Cuba, allied to their critique of the US-driven neo-liberal expansionism of the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (ALCA), and their instigation of the Encounters of Latin American Autonomous Popular Organisations (ELOPA) give us all cause for hope, despite the death threats and petrol-bombs hurled at them.

In Eastern Europe, to all intents and purposes part of the global South, the collaboration of groups like Autonomous Action (AD) of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and Armenia and others in the "Abolishing the Borders from Below" network again is giving rise to dynamic new voices speaking with experience of real struggles. In Europe, that part of the International Libertarian Solidarity (ILS) network located there (we are also a member) has been breaking down sectarian barriers between anarchist organisations. notable is the establishment of the journal "Afrique XXI", a French-language anarchist analytical magazine covering Africa. In North America, the example of the North-Eastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists (NEFAC) has sparked off a resurgence of regional anarchist organisations that are tackling real issues like race, class, terrorism, the war industries, organisational modes, workplace militancy etc. head-on and unashamedly. We find NEFAC's "The Northeastern Anarchist" a keen and relevant journal. As a global movement, our weakest links seem to be in northern Africa and in Asia, but perhaps that is just a problem of linguistic barriers

because we keep hearing about anarchist organisations in Iran, Iraq, Indonesia, the Philippines etc.

What do you think of the western anarchist movement? What do you think we can learn from each other?

The first thing to recognise is the historical strength of the global Southern anarchist movement. This is neatly introduced in Jason Adams' "Non-Western Anarchisms: Rethinking the Global Context" and will be dealt with in great detail in an upcoming BMC book that we hope will totally rewrite anarchist history - and give it the currency it deserves. To put it simply, the movement in countries as diverse as Mexico and China, Brazil and Cuba, Mozambique and Argentina, Chile and Uruguay was at one time far more powerful than any other revolutionary tendency, putting anarchist strength in Spain in the shade.

The second thing to recognise is that we need each other and can and must learn from each other. Internationalism is not about having exotic posters on the walls of one's meeting-place, but rather in having an ongoing interaction on anarchist ideas and struggles across the globe.

The third thing to recognise is that the Western anarchist movement comes with a lot of baggage that we new Southern movements find arcane and foreign. This is especially true of the Anglophone movement, inheritors of a crippling sense of defeat, chaos and ivory tower defensiveness that is totally unjustifiable in the light of the real post-1939 anarchist history - and out of touch with the challenges posed by neo-corporatism (neo-liberalism). That said, we are delighted to see that the North is awakening from this sweaty bad dream and starting to locate its organisations at the very epicentre of anti-capitalist struggle again.

Racism must be a point of concern for you. How would you say your approach differed from, say, anarchists in North America? Does the different social set-up change mean a different analysis and practice?

The fault-line of racism (closely duplicated by class) is the fundamental reality of South African life after three centuries of white supremacist rule and deliberate under-development of the ruled, whether indigenous, Asian, brown or black. This is an inescapable fact and one that has troubled, challenged and enlightened our movement

right from the start when we were essentially two underground organisations in the dying days of apartheid. In formulating our draft full constitution, which will hopefully be adopted at our congress later this year, the constitutional working group had a long debate over the very real differences between those collectives of ours like the ZAG and its Sowetan counterparts, the Shesha Action Group (SAG) and the Black Action Group (BAG) on the one hand that were largely black and township/locally based - and those like the BMC, the ABC and ZB on the other hand that were largely white and suburban/regionally based.

The minority view was that these should be recognised as "frontline" and "service" collectives, respectively, a divide that would recognise the race/class divide so as actively to confront it (usually by cross-membership of collectives and cross-participation in projects like publishing, food gardens etc). The majority view that won out was that to underscore these divisions meant to tacitly retain them by maintaining a "division of labour" between our collectives. Whatever the ZACF congress finally decides, it is likely and preferable, that the orientation of the ZACF of the future to these complex questions will be determined more by those working class people who have a direct experience of racism. We would say that our overarching approach as revolutionaries is class struggle - but that in the SA context this so closely replicates a struggle against white supremacism that the two have to work in tandem, without the class issue absorbing or downplaying the importance of race.

As a multi-"racial" organisation that has deliberately united activists from divided backgrounds, our main difference with the Western anarchist movement is that we do not feel the need for separate organisations for people of colour. We must say that we welcome the founding of ethnic organisations such as the Anarchist People of Color (APOC) network in the US, or the Popular Indigenous Council of Oaxaca - Ricardo Flores Magon (CIPO-RFM) in Mexico - where such organising appears to be crucial to establishing the validity of anarchism in marginalised communities. But in a majority black region where we have for too long been separated, racially-specific organisations would send out totally the wrong signals to the oppressed classes. In future, the ZACF

may decide to establish a working group to deal specifically with this issue, but to be honest, for the moment, with significant black support, we are more concerned internally with the low level of women's participation.

Your organisation is influenced by Platformism and anarcho-syndicalism. Do you see an conflict between the two? What attracts you to each of them? What do you reject in each tradition?

Firstly, it must be clearly understood what "platformism" is and what it is not - then where it fits into the anarcho-syndicalist approach to mass popular libertarian communist organisation. There is far too much confusion in anarchist ranks generated by a debate that arose in response to the chaotic and ultimately ineffective anarchist response to the Russian Revolution by most of those on the ground at the time. The Platform was merely a re-statement (at a time of confusion generated by the defeat of anarchism by Bolshevism) of the fundamentals of anarchist mass organising that had been established in the libertarian communist majority of the First International and in the mainstream of the anarchist mass movement ever since. It was not a novel invention by a bunch of disgruntled Ukrainians, but a wake-up call for a return from chaotic individualism to the mass organisation that had made the movement a global force to be reckoned with in the first place.

The tradition to which the "draft" platform (it was a discussion document, not a blueprint, after all) recalled the movement was to an anarcho-syndicalism infused with the anarcho-communist vision of a world without bosses or borders (not even between field, factory or community), for which it goes without saying, clear and firm principles and directly-democratically-agreed collective practices were and remain an absolute necessity. So let us be clear: "platformism" is NOT a different type of anarchism, but merely as GP Maximoff pointed out, a re-statement of the internal coherence required by anarchist organisations in order to be the engine of working class revolution.

In other words, platformism IS an organisational form, NOT an ideology. There is only one ideological type of anarchism, although it is a broad tradition: international revolutionary class-struggle anarchism, which embraces workplace, community, militia and other organising. Anything else,

any "personal liberation" theory, is not only sub-revolutionary, but non-anarchist. So to answer your question: there is absolutely no conflict between anarcho-syndicalism and platformism (although a union that is open to all workers may have difficulty being entirely platformist, while with an anarchist federation it should be easy). The conflict is between the genuine mass anarchist tradition and the pale, atomistic liberal fakes that masquerade as anarchist in much of the Anglophone world.

Do you draw upon any specifically Southern African ideas, struggles or movements today or in the past to inform your anarchism? If so, what are they?

Our current ZACF draft constitution locates us squarely within not only the southern African revolutionary syndicalist and anarcho-syndicalist tradition discussed already (the IWA and IWIU especially), but within the anarchist (anti-)political tradition of the Socialist Club (SC), founded in 1900 in South Africa by Henry Glasse, of the Revolutionary League (LR) of Mozambique, founded in the early 1900s by exiled Portuguese anarchist Jose Estevam, and of the Industrial Socialist League (IndSL) of South Africa in the period of the Russian Revolution. In later years, we recall the syndicalism of the 1970s defined by activists like Ric Turner, murdered in 1978 by what is believed to have been an apartheid death-squad.

Often today when talking to people who are not familiar with anarchism we liken the anarchist principles of horizontal self-management and co-operation to the tactics used by the United Democratic Front of the popular insurrection of the late 1980s, which is well known and was very successful in contributing to the fall of apartheid. There is nothing specifically South African about the UDF but that the tactics and strategy it adopted were proven through the struggle to be the most effective, namely: rank-and-file workers' and community councils, workers militias etc. all of which are anarchist in principle although the people involved had probably never heard of anarchism. Our inspiration in the present are the radical and progressive social movements, where they follow on in that libertarian tradition. Thus, domestically, our traditions are those of revolutionary syndicalism, specific anarchist organisation, popular insurrection and community control combined into a

the appearance of self-described anarchist groups in the black townships and squatter camps - initially totally without our input or influence - is an exciting validation of the attractiveness of anarchist ideas, even where no materials are available and no tradition exists!

seamless whole. It is important to note the reasoning behind our name: Zabalaza means struggle; Anarchist Communist is not just our political orientation, but taps into the respect that a true egalitarian communist vision still commands in SA; and Federation for our structural form.

Your Zabalaza Books webpage (www.zabalaza.net) is a great resource. Why did you decide to put so much energy into it? And how popular is it?

Thank you. The site seems to be very popular amongst anarchists in the global North/ West who have much better access to the Internet than in Africa and we often get encouraging remarks both through e-mail and in person when we meet comrades from abroad. But the ZB pages and their associated links have also enabled us to reach out to anarchists in Africa, Eastern Europe, the ex-USSR and Australasia in particular. Why do we do it? "From each according to their ability, to each according to their need."

anarchists in the region to our congress as observers, and plan to invite other autonomists and libertarians on the second day for joint discussions on how we engage with the radical and progressive social movements. Congress will chart our way forward for the rest of the year. We would also like to set up offices in both Durban and Johannesburg, which are our main areas of activity, and we are looking into buying photocopiers for both regions in order to be able to increase our output of anarchist material and further their circulation. A printing press would be ideal but this is out of our reach financially. In addition we would like to put more focus on translating anarchist literature into indigenous languages and we would also like to try and get people from all the regions in southern Africa that have an anarchist presence together at a "no-border" camp, for possibly the first time in African history.

Finally, what message do you have for anarchists in the west?

If there is a single message we could get across it would be this: drop the liberal individualist baggage and get down to the real nitty-gritty of anarchist organising in your workplaces and your communities. Ignore the flakes who claim that organised anarchism is an oxymoron. Let your actions be your propaganda because people watch what you do more readily than they listen to what you say.

Class War: Just Do It! Oh, and if any of you have any old printing presses to assist us with our anarchist printing project (to which the Swedish SAC has already contributed funds), please consider donating them to us.

This interview was done collectively by 2 Durban and 2 Johannesburg members of the ZACF over December'03/ January'04.



What plans has your organisation got for the near future?

Our immediate plans are to extend our community libraries and food gardens into other parts of Soweto and Sebokeng (a township further south of Soweto) and to strengthen our Workers' Council in Durban. Next up is the holding of our first full congress at which our full constitution will be adopted. We will invite all interested

Anarchism and Community Politics

The last issue of **Black Flag** had an article on the "*Independent Working Class Association*" (IWCA) called "*Fighting on Home Turf: Community politics and the IWCA.*" As the article noted, bar the Harringey Solidarity Group, there is "*no compatible anarchist organisations doing the same sort of work.*" For that reason it was good to hear about the IWCA.

Sadly, however, the author shied away from critiquing the IWCA and, in particular, its electoralism. Yes, many anarchists do "feel uneasy" about the IWCA standing in elections and it is a shame that all the author did was to state they were not going to "rerun arguments about elections." I think that we should be discussing why anarchists "feel uneasy" about electioneering and, more importantly, discussing alternatives to it.

This is nothing to do with dogma or sectarianism. It is to do with understanding how we can change the world for the better while, at the same time, avoiding the mistakes of the past. It seems incredible that some anarchists are participating in an organisation using tactics which have failed time and time again. I know that most Marxists tend to ignore evidence and history in favour of a blind repetition of the conclusions a couple of dead German's drew 150 years ago from a short period of British labour history, but I thought better of anarchists.

I won't go into why anarchists reject electioneering in any depth. History shows that it produces reformism. Whether it be the Marxist Social Democrats before the First World War or the German Greens, the experience of organisations using this tactic have confirmed the anarchist analysis. All it produced was a slow and slippery decent into reformism, hidden behind radical rhetoric. Unsurprisingly, Lula in Brazil who has now joined that large pantheon of leftists who betray their voters and implement capitalist policies.

Even if radicals managed to get into office with their politics intact, they would soon face economic and political pressure to conform to the capitalist agenda. Any radical administration would face pressures from capitalists resulting from capital flight, withdrawal of support. Politically, the pressure is just as bad. We must remember that there is a difference between the state

and government. The state is the permanent collection of institutions that have entrenched power structures and interests. The government is made up of various politicians. It's the institutions that have power in the state due to their permanence, not the representatives who come and go. So real power does not lie with politicians, but instead within the state bureaucracy and big business. Faced with these powers, we have seen left-wing governments introduce right-wing policies. So we cannot expect different politicians to act in different ways to the same pressures.

Every supporter of electioneering argues that they will be an exception to this sorry process. They can only appeal to the good intentions and character of their candidates. Anarchists, however, present an analysis of the structures and other influences that will determine how the character of the successful candidates and political parties will change.

Parliamentarianism, moreover, focuses the fight for change into the hands of leaders. Rather than those involved doing the fighting, the organising, the decision making, that power rests in the hands of the representative. The importance of the leaders is stressed. Politics become considered as parliamentary activities made for the population by their representatives, with the 'rank and file' left with no other role than that of passive support. Instead of working class self-activity and self-organisation, there is a substitution and a non working class leadership acting for people replaces self-management in social struggle.

An Alternative

Those libertarians in the IWCA are correct to argue that anarchists should work in their local communities. However, anarchists have done and are doing just that and are being very successful as well. The difference is that anarchists should be building self-managed community organisations rather than taking part in the capitalist state. That way we build a real alternative to the existing system while fighting for improvements in the here and now.

That can only be done by direct action and anti-parliamentarian organisation. Through direct action, people manage their own struggles, it is they who conduct it, organise it. They do not

hand over to others their own acts and task of self-liberation. That way, we become accustomed to managing our own affairs, creating alternative, libertarian, forms of social organisation which can become a force to resist the state, win reforms and become the framework of a free society.

This form of community activity can be called "community syndicalism." It means the building of community assemblies which can address the issues of their members and propose means of directly tackling them. It would mean federating these assemblies into a wider organisation. If it sounds familiar that is not surprising as something similar was done during the campaign against the poll-tax.

The idea of community assemblies has a long history. Kropotkin, for example, pointed to the sections and districts of the French Revolution, arguing that there the masses were "*accustoming themselves to act without receiving orders from the national representatives, were practising what was to be described later as Direct Self-Government.*" He concluded that "*the principles of anarchism . . . already dated from 1789, and that they had their origin, not in theoretical speculations, but in the deeds of the Great French Revolution*" and that "*the libertarians would no doubt do the same to-day.*" (*The Great French Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 203, p. 204 and p. 206)

A similar concern for community organising and struggle was expressed in Spain. While the collectives during the revolution are well known, the CNT had long organised in the community and around non-workplace issues. As well as defence committees in various working class communities to organise and co-ordinate struggles and insurrections, the CNT organised various community based struggles. The most famous example of this must be the CNT organised rent strikes during the early 1930s in Barcelona. In 1931, the CNT's Construction Union organised a "*Economic Defence Commission*" to study working class expenses such as rent. The basic demand was for a 40% rent decrease, but also addressed unemployment and the cost of food. The campaign was launched by a mass meeting on May 1st, 1931. Three days later, an unemployed family was re-installed into

the home they had been evicted from. This was followed by other examples across the city. By August, Barcelona had 100,000 rent strikers (see Nick Rider, *The Practice of Direct Action: the Barcelona rent strike of 1931* in **For Anarchism**, edited by David Goodway)

In Gijón, the CNT "reinforced its populist image by . . . its direct consumer campaigns. Some of these were organised through the federation's Anti-Unemployment Committee, which sponsored numerous rallies and marches in favour of 'bread and work.' While they focused on the issue of jobs, they also addressed more general concerns about the cost of living for poor families. In a May 1933 rally, for example, demonstrators asked that families of unemployed workers not be evicted from their homes, even if they fell behind on the rent." The "organisers made the connections between home and work and tried to draw the entire family into the struggle." However, the CNT's "most concerted attempt to bring in the larger community was the formation of a new syndicate, in the spring of 1932, for the Defence of Public Interests (SDIP). In contrast to a conventional union, which comprised groups of workers, the SDIP was organised through neighbourhood committees. Its specific purpose was to enforce a generous renters' rights law of December 1931 that had not been vigorously implemented. Following anarcho-syndicalist strategy, the SDIP utilised various forms of direct action, from rent strikes, to mass demonstrations, to the reversal of evictions." This last action involved the local SDIP group going to a home, breaking the judge's official eviction seal and carrying the furniture back in from the street. They left their own sign: "opened by order of the CNT." The CNT's direct action strategies "helped keep political discourse in the street, and encouraged people to pursue the same extra-legal channels of activism that they had developed under the monarchy." (Pamela Beth Radcliff, **From mobilization to civil war: the politics of polarization in the Spanish city of Gijón, 1900-1937**, pp. 287-288, p. 289)

More recently, in Southern Italy, anarchists have organised a very successful **Municipal Federation of the Base (FMB)** in Spezzano Albanese. This organisation is "an alternative to the power of the town hall" and provides a "glimpse of what a future libertarian society could be" (in the

words of one activist). The aim of the Federation is "the bringing together of all interests within the district. In intervening at a municipal level, we become involved not only in the world of work but also the life of the community. . . the FMB make counter proposals [to Town Hall decisions], which aren't presented to the Council but proposed for discussion in the area to raise people's level of consciousness. Whether they like it or not the Town Hall is obliged to take account of these proposals." ("Community Organising in Southern Italy", pp. 16-19, **Black Flag** no. 210)

In this way, local people take part in deciding what effects them and their community and create a self-managed "dual power" to the local, and national, state. They also, by taking part in self-managed community assemblies, develop their ability to participate and manage their own affairs, so showing that the state is unnecessary and harmful to their interests. In addition, the FMB also supports co-operatives within it, so creating a communalised, self-managed economic sector within capitalism.

The long, hard work of the CNT in Spain resulted in mass village assemblies being created in the Puerto Real area, near Cadiz in the late 1980s. These community assemblies came about to support an industrial struggle by shipyard workers. As one CNT member explains, "every Thursday of every week, in the towns and villages in the area, we had all-village assemblies where anyone connected with the particular issue [of the rationalisation of the shipyards], whether they were actually workers in the shipyard itself, or women or children or grandparents, could go along. . . and actually vote and take part in the decision making process of what was going to take place." With such popular input and support, the shipyard workers won their struggle. However, the assembly continued after the strike and "managed to link together twelve different organisations within the local area that are all interested in fighting. . . various aspects [of capitalism]" including health, taxation, economic, ecological and cultural issues. Moreover, the struggle "created a structure which was very different from the kind of structure of political parties, where the decisions are made at the top and they filter down. What we managed to do in Puerto Real was make decisions at the base and take them upwards."

(**Anarcho-Syndicalism in Puerto Real: from shipyard resistance to direct democracy and community control**, p. 6)

Even more recently, the Argentina revolt saw community assemblies develop. Like the sections of the French Revolution, they were directly democracy and played a key role in pushing the revolt forward (see "From Riot to Revolution", **Black Flag**, no. 221). Unsurprisingly, the politicians were aghast at the people actually wanting to make their own decisions — even going so far as to label them "undemocratic." Faced with real democracy, the politicians quickly tried to concoct a general election to place the focus of events away from the mass of the population and back onto a few politicians working in capitalist institutions. And, of course, the left went along with this farce, helping the bourgeoisie disempower the grassroots organisations created in and for direct struggle.

Conclusion

These examples all show the possibilities of "community syndicalism." They show anarchists creating viable libertarian alternatives in the community. In contrast to the deadend of electioneering, they involved people in managing their own affairs and struggles directly. They did not let a few leaders fight their battles for them within bourgeois institutions. Moreover, it allowed revolutionaries to apply their ideas in practical ways which did not have the same deradicalising and reformist tendencies as electioneering.

Ultimately, the recent turn to electoral politics by the left is (as it always is) a sign of weakness, *not* strength. Such a strategy of building alternative community organisations is much harder than trying to get people to vote for you every few years. It would be a shame for anarchists to follow the left down the well-trodden path to opportunism and reformism. The left is declining, politically, morally and organisationally. We should be talking about how we can create a libertarian alternative which has practical ideas on how to apply our ideas in the here and now. But it seems that some libertarians seem happier to join non-anarchist groups than try and develop a genuine anarchist approach to the problem of spreading our ideas within our class.

Hopefully these examples from our past will provoke a wider discussion on where to go now.

An Anarchist Classic

Alexander Berkman's *"What is Anarchism?"* is simply one of the best introductions to the ideas of what is often called class struggle anarchism (or communist anarchism, as it was called in 1927 when the book was originally written). Berkman had been an active anarchist militant in America for over 25 years and this book summarises the ideas and ideals which drove that activism.

Drawing upon his experiences in the labour and unemployed movements as well as his time in revolutionary Russia, Berkman's book is an excellent and very readable account of the basics of anarchism. Despite being nearly 80 years old, his work is remarkably undated. His account of the injustices of capitalism and the state are as applicable today as they were then. He discusses the roots of war, unemployment and injustice in the capitalist system and, more importantly, points to the means of ending them. Along the way, he refutes various false solutions. His chapter on socialism, for example, should be read by every radical who thinks electioneering is a good tactic. Similarly, his discussion of the Russian revolution is an excellent summary of why it went wrong. And every worker should read his account of the failings of the trade unions. As a trade unionist I know his account of the sectionalism and bureaucratic nature of the trade unions is as relevant today as when it was written (as are his sensible and practical recommendations for the labour movement).

At the core of the book is a concise and well argued case for anarchism. He

refutes many of the usual straw men arguments against our ideas (is anarchism violent? aren't anarchists against organisation? doesn't equality mean we become identical? and other such nonsense). He stresses that change can only come from below, from the class struggle. He reiterates the point that we, the working class, have the power to change society. He explains why revolution is necessary and what it could involve. He stresses that any revolution will be work of the oppressed, of the working class organised in their own class organisations. As he puts it, "the strength of the revolution" lies "in the support of the people" when "they feel that they themselves are making the revolution, that they have become masters of their lives, that they have gained freedom and are building up their welfare." From his experiences in Lenin's Russia, he adds "deprive the people of power by setting up some authority over them . . . and you have dealt a fatal blow to the revolution. You will have robbed it of its main source of strength, the masses." Sadly, most revolutionaries in the UK have not learned that lesson and still subscribe to Leninism. Hopefully, some will read Berkman's book and learn the errors of their ways (or, at least, read his chapter on the "Defence of the Revolution" and stop asserting anarchists don't realise a revolution needs defending!).

His sketch of what a communist anarchist society would look like is brief, but convincing. A decentralised, free society where we work together as equals and share the riches of the world is an inspiring goal. While he does

What is Anarchism?

Alexander Berkman

AK Press, £10

ISBN 1-902593-70-7

stress (like Kropotkin) that any revolution will face economic disruption (and, correctly, recommends decentralisation as a solution) his account of the immediate introduction of libertarian communism seems somewhat unrealistic. No revolution, not even the Spanish with its decades of anarchist propaganda, saw the kind of revolution Berkman argues for. Obviously, as a goal to aim for he is correct but Berkman underestimates the problems a revolution throws into the path of achieving it. We should be aware that no revolution ever develops exactly as we would hope and we must, therefore, be prepared for this and not fall in dogmatism (and the resulting authoritarianism that would inevitably produce). However, compared to Marxism his account of a revolution and the problems it will face is extremely realistic as are, in the main, his suggestions.

Of course, the book shows its age. There is no discussion of ecology, for example. Similarly, there is no discussion of the causes of sexism, racism and homophobia and how to end them. Yet in spite of this, the book is as fresh and powerful as the day it was written. A true anarchist classic. For too long, Berkman's work has only been available in two volumes: *"ABC of Anarchism"* by Freedom Press and *"What is Communist Anarchism?"* by Phoenix Press. AK Press should be congratulated in reprinting Berkman's classic introduction to anarchism in its full glory.

Mayday and Anarchism:

Remembrance and Resistance from Haymarket to now

The Kate Sharpley Library has done it again! This collection of May Day related texts is essential reading for those looking to discover what it is all about: a day of celebrating previous and current struggles against capitalism.

Reclaiming May Day is not about "nostalgia" nor purely about remembering our fallen comrades. It is about showing that "if we want to win meaningful reforms — let alone a free society — we must fight the power of both state and capital." The texts

Edited by Anna Key

Kate Sharpley Library

BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX

ISBN 1-873605-53-6, £3

collected here do exactly that.

The pamphlet includes articles by Nestor Makhno and from Emma Goldman's *Mother Earth*, speeches by three of the eight Haymarket Martyrs (plus the Illinois Governor who pardoned them), as well as texts from Italian, Spanish and South American anarchists. It ends with more recent accounts of reclaiming mayday in Britain. The only thing missing is one of

Voltairine de Cleyre's fiery speeches commemorating the Martyrs.

The pamphlet also includes the attempts by anarchists in 1890s London to reclaim May Day from the trade union bureaucrats and politicians who sought to turn it into a nice walk on a Sunday. After four years, no more anarchist demonstrations were held.

Hopefully this will not happen again! At the very least we can ensure a large anarchist presence on the Trade Union marches to remind them and the world of the true meaning of May Day: direct action, solidarity and workers' control of their own struggles and organisations.

How we shall bring about the revolution:

Syndicalism and the co-operative commonwealth

Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget
Pluto Press (available from Freedom Press, £3.95)

This book was written in 1909 by two leading French revolutionary syndicalists. Originally translated into English and published in 1913 by two British anarchists, it can be considered as representative of the ideas of the then syndicalist French union, the CGT. Successfully applying the ideas of Bakunin and the libertarian wing of the First International, the activism, militancy and ideas of the CGT had inspired many across the globe, including many of those active in our own "syndicalist revolt" of the 1910s.

The work itself is a novel in which the two Emile's present a summary of the ideas then dominant in the revolutionary wing of the CGT. The title indicates the nature of the book, namely how a successful revolution was conducted in France — with the CGT at its head. In some ways, it is a syndicalist "Conquest of Bread" and, perhaps unsurprisingly, Kropotkin provides an extremely important (from an anarchist perspective) preface. In other ways, it is like Morris's "New from Nowhere," a syndicalist utopian novel. However, as it stresses the means rather than the ends, the work follows more in Kropotkin's footsteps (if not in his breadth of vision).

What strikes the reader is how this work refutes some of the myths grown up around revolutionary syndicalism. For example, rather than seeing the revolution as coming about by means of a passive general strike (the folding of arms), Pataud and Pouget see it as insurrectionary. The revolt is anything but passive, with the stress continually placed on how the workers took the initiative to hinder and fight the state, to spread the strike, to expropriate capital, and so on. The general strike is seen not only as a result of local action, but as the starting point for wider action. Equally, the idea that syndicalists simply ignored the state and focused on expropriating capital is shown to be false. The state is not ignored, rather it

is purposely and definitely destroyed by the revolt which turns from a rolling general strike into insurrection. The way the revolution unfolds also destroys the idea that syndicalists thought that revolution would have to wait until *all* workers were unionised. Like Bakunin, the Emile's see the role of the revolutionary unions as encouraging the process of revolt, with the revolution itself organising those outside of the unions.

The book is utopian in the best and worse sense of the word. It shows that another world is possible and, equally as important, a means of getting there. Undoubtedly the book gets the overall nature of a libertarian social revolution correct, even if some of its more "visionary" ideas seem weak. It stresses the ability and power of working class people to change the world, which can only inspire. However, its account of the problems facing the revolution is weak (i.e. utopian in the worse sense!). Defence of the revolution is over in two chapters (one for internal and one for external threats). As such, Kropotkin's comments that they downplay the resistance the revolution would face are spot on. And it shows its age, with the application of technology defeating the counter-revolution. Jules Verne would have been proud of the gas warfare, ray-guns and guided missiles applied by syndicalist France to repeal the enemy! Today, all libertarians would leave such means to Bolshevism (after all, Trotsky did approve the use of poison gas against Kronstadt!).

So, this work raises important issues, even if its coverage is not always sufficient (e.g. defence of the revolution, the liberation of women, the role of "money," the way the revolution stops at the border and so on). It is stronger on the means, the struggle, rather than the ends. As such its emphasis on local action, the need for workers to expropriate capital

directly to overcome the disruption caused by any revolution and start to meet social needs, the awareness that revolution is a process and that different areas will progress at different speeds are all in its favour. In addition, it recognises that revolutions need to create new forms of organisation to replace those whose purpose is no more. Thus the union self-management replaces wage slavery, the CGT congress becomes in effect a soviet congress to co-ordinate joint activity (again, echoing Bakunin and other anarchists). The book does, unfortunately, downplay the divisions between reformists and revolutionaries in the CGT (revolutions tend to deepen such divides, not eliminate them as the authors wished) as well as the influence of politicians and political parties. These parties rarely disappear as easily as the Emile's would like us to believe and, as the Russian Revolution shows, their negative impact can be divisive. And, of course, the descent of the CGT into reformism and Communist domination may make us question the validity of certain aspects of the CGT's syndicalism, a topic impossible to cover here.

All in all, this book is worth reading. There is no denying that some of it is dated and inadequate, but it does give the reader a sense of power and possibility, that we do not have to live like this, that better ways are possible. Equally as important, it gives us a sense of what a libertarian revolution would be like. Their utopia is created and run from below upwards, by the actions and organisations of working class people themselves. It gives, as Kropotkin put it in his preface, the "general idea" of how a social revolution would develop and if that encourages us to apply our libertarian ideas in a similar way today then Pataud and Pouget's work is still of validity today.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back

Imagine:

A Socialist Vision for the 21st Century

Tommy Sheridan and Alan McCombes
Rebel Inc.
£7.99

For the few that do not know, Tommy Sheridan is the Scottish Socialist Party's leader. He is one of their five Members of the Scottish Parliament (until 2003, he was their sole MSP). He reached public awareness during the poll tax revolt, playing a leading role in the Strathclyde, Scottish and British Anti-Poll Tax Federations. Back then both he and McCombes were leading members of Militant. With the expulsion of that group from Labour, it split and the largest faction subsequently became an independent party. In Scotland, undoubtedly due to their activity against the Poll Tax, they have managed to form a viable, if small, political party which has had some impact in elections (indeed it regularly saves its deposits) and the SWP in Scotland has merged with it. Thanks to PR, Sheridan and his four comrades got into the Scottish Parliament.

Their book is a statement of the mainstream political vision of the SSP, their argument for and vision of socialism within an independent Scotland. *Imagine* is, of course, John Lennon's classic song about communism. While obviously seeking association with that vision of true socialism, Sheridan and McCombes' book has more in common with Lenin. In fact, it reminded me a lot of Lenin's *State and Revolution*. Like Lenin's book, *Imagine* combines a heavy dose of libertarian sounding rhetoric with a typically statist foundation.

Which brings us to the crux of the problem. The book has a dual nature, it almost has two souls. On the one hands, the politics of book clearly show the legacy of Trotskyism, in the tradition that the SSP has come from (namely *Militant*). On the other, its positive vision borrows a lot from the libertarian tradition. Indeed, Sheridan and McCombs actually at one point call their vision "*democratic libertarian socialism*." (p. 171) Perhaps this is to be expected. With the collapse of Stalinism, the centralised, party run

vision of "socialism" expounded by Trotskyism lost any appeal it may have held. Equally, in this age of green protest and ecological awareness, the Leninist "big is beautiful" message would fall on deaf ears (chapter 8 is obviously aimed at greens). Lenin's vision of enormous state capitalist trusts and banks constituting the framework of "socialism" is hardly part of the green "small is beautiful" tradition!

As such, *Imagine*'s vision of socialism has a superficial feeling of Bakunin and Kropotkin to it. Socialism, we are informed, "*is about creating grassroots democracy from the bottom upwards. In a genuine socialist system, there could be mass decision-making on all the big issues through democratic referenda. There could also be maximum decentralisation of power right down to local communities and workplaces.*" This means that the "*mass of the population . . . decides to take matters into their own hands . . . Passive support is not enough . . . socialism had to be built from the bottom up rather than from the top down.*" Indeed, "*Socialism is about moving away from representative democracy — in which other people take all the important decisions on your behalf — towards direct democracy.*" Economically, the anarchist vision is also implied: "*Instead of centralised planning by a remote bureaucracy there could be decentralised democratic planning using advanced information technology.*" (pp. 166-7, p. 154, p. 166, pp. 190-1)

All good anarchist imagery. That the rhetoric of the libertarian version of socialism has (yet again!) been appropriated by Marxists should not blind us. The Bolsheviks did something similar in 1917, appropriating anarchistic slogans to gain popular influence while, at the same time, giving them a radically different meaning and quickly forgetting them once the party is in power. As such, there is a tendency



when reading Leninist inspired books to dismiss them out of hand. After all, the Bolsheviks promised a radical democracy and quickly undermined it to preserve party power. The Bolshevik gerrymandering and disbanding of soviets in early 1918 and subsequent advocating of party dictatorship and one-man management should be enough to justify this cynical position. But what of *Imagine*? Is the anarchist rhetoric genuine or does it cover traditional Leninist politics? Sadly, the answer is sadly all too clear — anarchist rhetoric is being used to freshen up the stale politics of state socialism.

The incompatible nature of the two visions of socialism is made clear, ironically enough, when the book attempts to paint its tradition as libertarian. The authors quote Trotsky approvingly to prove socialism would not harm the liberty of artists: "*Art must find its own road . . . The methods of Marxism are not its methods . . . The field of art is not one in which the party is called to command.*" (p. 219) So in which fields *is* the party "*called to command*"? And how does this fit in with "*democratic libertarian socialism*"? Simply put, it cannot. Ultimately, *Imagine* is based on the fallacy that popular power can be delegated without being destroyed, that socialism can be combined with the state.

For all the talk of direct democracy and from the bottom up, *Imagine*'s "*future socialist society*" would still have "*parliamentary representatives*," although, we are informed, they will not

be a "privileged elite" with high salaries but "paid the average salary of a skilled worker." (p. 166) Looking at local democracy, it would be based on the "existing network of community councils" and this "community government" would be "accountable to local people." (p. 171) The idea that working class people could manage their own fates directly via federations of popular assemblies is nowhere to be seen. Rather, the vision is one based on electing representatives who would,

obviously, have the real power. As such, the key aim of socialism (namely equality) is violated from the start. Some would have more power than others, a few would govern the many.

They do argue that "without grassroots democracy . . . the result will be bureaucracy, oppression, and dictatorship." Unfortunately they weaken this concern for democracy by adding the rider that this "grassroots democracy" was one "in which the people as a whole have ultimate say over the running of society." (p. 168) Having "ultimate say" does not mean "the people" actually run society directly, rather it means the opposite, namely that "the people" simply designate its rulers who actually do run it.

It is for this reason that anarchists think it is naive to try and combine representative institutions with directly democratic ones. Like oil and water, the two do not mix. Either the organs of popular self-management (such as community and workplace assemblies) are in power or the representatives (a handful of people) are. To blur this issue by confusing "accountability" with real participation in decision making means failing to understand the dynamics of socialism. Instead of representative structures, anarchists argue for popular assemblies to be linked federally by assemblies of mandated, recallable delegates. Assemblies at every level would elect action committees to implement decisions but these would have strict mandates and perform an administrative role.

Imagine's attempts to inject some

participation miss the point. "Direct democracy via electronic voting and online referenda," they assert, "is no longer the stuff of science fiction." In a socialist Scotland we would have "the right" to "organise petitions to demand a referendum on any . . . issue." All of which drives home the fact that the working class would not be

***Imagine's* Scottish 'socialist' republic would have a predominantly capitalist economy, one in which over 93.7% of business would employ wage slaves and make a profit on the market. Whatever happened to the idea that socialism involves the abolition the wages system and wage labour?**

managing society — but they can "petition" those who do (namely the "managers and administrators" would make "routine decisions" which are "naturally delegated to" them). (p. 170) So when they argue for a "hi-tech socialism," that "cutting edge technology" will allow "direct democracy to flourish for the first time since ancient tribal society" they fail to understand what makes direct democracy special. (p. 75) There is more to "direct democracy" than organising referendum, even "hi-tech" ones. Isolated individuals saying yes or no is not much better than isolated individuals putting a cross on a bit of paper. Tribal society was based on community discussion and decision making, as were the more recent examples of real direct democracy which flourished during the French, Spanish and other revolutions. The locus of power rests in popular assemblies, in other words, not in totting up the votes of individuals separated from each other. Referenda are utterly compatible with minority rule (i.e. representative government and capitalism) as can be seen from numerous capitalist countries. It should not be confused with self-management, the people organised into assemblies to discuss and debate their own affairs directly. While minority rule can happily co-exist with referenda, it cannot do so with popular assemblies. This is why anarchism roots itself in such organs of self-management.

Socialism?

So *Imagine* falls well short of a truly socialist political scheme (i.e. a federated, self-managed commune republic). Sadly, its economic vision also falls well short of socialism. There

would be a mixed economy based on state and municipally owned workplaces, co-operatives (encouraged by cheap loans and other incentives), plus "private" sections. These private sections would compass two extremes.

The first would be small businesses employing "less than ten people." We are informed these would "thrive"

under "socialism" because they would "be competing with each other on a level playing field." So, according to *Imagine*, workers in 93.7% of Scottish businesses will still be wage slaves in a "socialist" Scotland. (p. 191)

So what of the 6.3% of businesses which are left? Well, "some larger companies . . . may even remain in private hands on the grounds of expediency." These may include call centres and "branch assembly plants" which "are individual links in an international production chain." We would not have to fear multinationals fleeing Scotland in fear of the "socialist" government as "most companies would probably still find it profitable to remain" (p. 192) This would apply to "media moguls" as well, who would still exist in "a socialist society," just as other capitalists would: "In any case, a socialist government would stand up to the media moguls and ensure that the future battle of ideas will be fought out on a level battleground." (p. 169)

Thus *Imagine's* Scottish "socialist" republic would have a predominantly capitalist economy, one in which over 93.7% of business would employ wage slaves and make a profit on the market. Whatever happened to the idea that socialism involves the abolition the wages system and wage labour?

What about the few firms deemed worthy of socialist transformation? Large-scale industry "could be owned by the people of Scotland as a whole and run by democratically elected boards in which workers, consumers, and the wider socialist government were all represented." (pp. 190-1) While Sheridan and McCombs are for workplaces which "could be democratically run, with elected workers' councils" this vision is, on closer inspection, not self-management. Rather the council would "ratify key decisions" made elsewhere, in the

hands of "executives and managers fully accountable to those they serve." There would be "industry-wide councils" which would "formulate, in conjunction with the elected government and consumer groups a more general plan for industry as a whole." (p. 170) So whom would the manager serve? The workforce or the plan (i.e. the government "groups")?

If all this looks familiar it is because it has similarities to Lenin's vision of "workers' control" during the Russian revolution. Dismissing the idea that workers could run industry themselves, he argued that they could "control" those who did (initially the capitalists). The workers' factory committees would be integrated into a system of state control (the basic structure of which would be inherited from capitalism). Thus the workers would elect someone who would then try and "control" (i.e. ratify the decisions of) those with real power in production. Rather than directly manage

production, workers were at the bottom of a structure of state control within which their factory committees played a minor role. Lenin had no qualms about calling his vision "state capitalism," incidentally. So while *Imagine* argues that "without democratic ownership . . . there can be no real democratic control," (p. 84) in fact, it is the other way round. Without self-management there can be no social ownership.

While the consumer groups make sense, the role of government "groups" in their system suggests a more "top down" system than the "grassroots upwards" one promised. The parallels to Lenin's state capitalism do not end there. Like Lenin, Sheridan and McCombs also call for a socialist Central Bank, although they do not claim, as he did, this was "nine-tenths of the socialist apparatus." Somewhat ironically, coming from Marxists, they inject a dash of Proudhon by arguing that this bank would ensure low-interest loans to start up co-operatives. (pp. 194-5)

However, times have changed. Leninist praise for the large-scale production and organisation of monopoly capitalism is missing, thankfully. Rather, we have the anarchist opposition to capitalist monotony. The "sameness" and bland nature of modern capitalism

is rightly condemned and rejected. The anarchist emphasis of appropriate levels of technology and scale are implied, as is decentralisation of production. As such, this is a step forward.

They also correctly point out that efficiency under capitalism is measured by profit and share value, with economics judging "whether a national economy is 'efficient' or 'inefficient' by totting up crude figures measuring economic growth." As the argue, "these statistics never tell us what's being produced, why it's being produced, how it's being produced, or whether it benefits or damages society." (p. 108) However, given that the bulk of their "socialist" economy will be capitalist, it follows that a key role of their "socialist" government will be to intervene into the economy to

Imagine is based on the fallacy that popular power can be delegated without being destroyed, that socialism can be combined with the state.

counteract such tendencies. An impossible task.

Stalinism

Sadly they weaken their arguments by their praise for Stalinism. They argue that "as a result of the abolition of capitalism, the Soviet Union achieved spectacular social and economic advances." They point to the huge increase in "Soviet industrial output" and its high growth rates in the 1950s, 1960s and even the 1970s. While they point to the social and environment costs of this regime, they obviously forgot their earlier critique of "totting up crude figures" and that statistics hide whether society is being damaged or not. That the high growth rates they praise were the product of a regime based on a "ruling bureaucracy" which "displayed an unhealthy obsession with stark statistics" and "strangled initiative and stifled individual flair" is ignored. (pp. 134-4)

A regime which stopped at nothing to accumulate capital would have substantial growth rates, but this is not worthy of praise! Equally, this glorification of Stalinist economic growth, while understandable due to their Trotskyist past, raises significant questions. If centralised planning can so "effective" then why does *Imagine* reject it in favour of decentralised

planning in its future socialist society? If the decentralised planning they seem to advocate does not lead to high levels of growth, will it be rejected in favour of techniques which can develop "productive forces"? Unsurprisingly, they point the reader to Trotsky's "*Revolution Betrayed*" to explain Stalinism (calling this superficial, confused book a "seminal analysis of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union"!). Thus the Janus like nature of their book springs forth. The libertarian influenced critique of the present is squeezed into their Trotskyist background and foundations of their politics.

Needless to say, their idea that capitalism was abolished in Russia has its ramifications in their vision of "socialism." As noted above, *Imagine* sees socialism existing while there is wage labour.

In the dark

They quote Tony Benn on how Trotsky was "the Soviet Union's first dissident." Surely they must know that the first "dissidents" in the Soviet Union were the anarchists, the

Mensheviks and Social-Revolutionaries imprisoned and shot by Trotsky and Lenin's political police from early 1918 onward? Equally, while they state that most journalists have "no understanding of who Leon Trotsky actually was, or what he stood for," Sheridan and McCombs make no comment on his support, when in power, for policies which were identical to those which many socialists condemn as Stalinist. Indeed, they assert that Trotsky "defended" socialist democracy while, in fact, he consistently advocated party dictatorship. Therefore, the historical tradition *Imagine* places itself is hardly the bastion of socialist democracy they would like to claim it is. Significantly, they stress that "for socialists, democracy is not an optional extra . . . Socialism without free elections, without free trade unions, without free speech, is not socialism." (p. 131) If so, Trotsky's politics were not socialist.

So while condemning Stalinism, they remain strangely silent about Lenin and Trotsky's authoritarian policies, leaving their comments on the matter to a bland and vague appeal to "the early days" of the Russian Revolution when it aimed at "co-operation, equality and democracy." (p. 133) The failure of the revolution is blamed on isolation and its

"backward" nature, with no mention of Bolshevik policies and their role in its degeneration. (p. 134). Ironically, they note that *"only when people are kept in the dark can they be controlled."* (p. 75) Sadly they fail to shed even the feeblest light on the defining event of their political tradition. As such, when they say Trotsky's

Revolution

Betrayed "remains to this day the most powerful and plausible

explanation of what went wrong in the

Soviet Union" (p. 139) I suspect that

Marx may be proved

right and history will repeat itself, this time as farce rather than tragedy.

Russia and Spain

Imagine is right to say that there have been *"tantalising glimpses of socialist democracy in action,"* yet they fail to mention that these *"glimpses"* were inspired by anarchism rather than Marxism (p. 172). The Spanish Revolution is raised, as is May 1968 in France. Significantly, Russia is not. Perhaps this is because the Bolsheviks systematically undermined the popular workplace and community self-management the authors praise Spain and France for?

In Spain, workers placed their workplaces under self-management. As noted above, Sheridan and McCombe cannot *"imagine"* a real socialist system, one based on real workers' self-management in spite of their praise for the *"socialist democracy"* introduced by the CNT during the Spanish Revolution (not that the CNT and its anarchism is mentioned). Yes, in Catalonia industry was run *"through*

mass meetings and democratically elected committees" but this is not the system advocated by Sheridan and McCombes! (p. 172) Rather than committees *"ratifying"* decisions made elsewhere, the assemblies of workers made all the important decisions which the committees then implemented. The assemblies *"ratified"* day to day decisions of the committees. The

difference between this (self-management) and *Imagine's* scheme (workers' control over the bosses) is obvious.

Needless to say, they fail to mention that Lenin and Trotsky explicitly opposed self-management in Russia in favour of one-man management armed

while condemning Stalinism, they remain strangely silent about Lenin and Trotsky's authoritarian policies

with *"dictatorial"* powers. Similarly, they, like the Bolsheviks, promise to *"reconstruct new defence forces, which would be democratic, egalitarian, and accountable."* (p. 149) While Trotskyists like to praise the CNT's militias for this, few mention that it was Trotsky who abolished such a regime in the Red Army in March 1918. As such, the use of Spain should not surprise.

Getting there

So far, we have discussed the limitations of *Imagine's* vision of the future. We now turn to a more pressing question, namely how will the change be achieved? It states that *"our programme will sooner or later sweep all before it at the ballot box"* and imagine that *"the forces of democratic socialism have swept to power in a general election, perhaps within an independent Scotland"* in 2010 or 2015. (p. 146)

Clearly, the politics of *Imagine* are

which have tried this path. Lenin's revision of Marxism in an anarchist direction (namely the simple fact that socialism cannot be achieved using Parliament) is likewise ignored.

Perhaps this explains why they redefine the meaning of social democracy? We are told it *"was in essence a more*

restrained and civilised version of the capitalist free market" and it aimed *"to reform capitalism."* (p. 116)

Of course they fail to mention that *originally* social democracy was no such thing. In fact it was a socialist party aiming, like the SSP, to use *"political action"* to win the class war

and institute socialism. Given the abject failure of this strategy, we can understand the desire to distance their ideas from it. So what can the fate of social democracy tell us?

Influenced by Marx and Engels, social democracy was wracked by the *"revisionism"* debate after the latter's death in 1895. The debate reflected the changes which were occurring in the party as its success at the ballot box grew. The revisionists wanted to modify the rhetoric of the party to bring it into line with its reformist practice while the Marxists stressed the goal of revolution. However in practice the distinction between the contenders remained largely a subjective one, a difference of ideas in the evaluation of reality rather than a difference in the realm of action. Rosa Luxemburg (one of the fiercest critics of revisionism) acknowledged in **Reform or Revolution** that it was *"the final goal of socialism*

[that] constitutes the only decisive factor

distinguishing the social democratic movement from bourgeois democracy and bourgeois radicalism." As such, the Marxist critics of..

Sheridan and McCombes are urging us to "imagine" a new version of social democracy rather than any real form of revolutionary socialism.

simply a modern restatement of social democracy, the idea that socialism will come about via voting socialists at elections. Sheridan and McCombes are urging us to *"imagine"* a new version of social democracy rather than any real form of revolutionary socialism. The history of the past 100 odd years is ignored, with no attempt to explain the degeneration of the previous parties

"revisionism" failed to place the growth in revisionist ideas in the tactics being used, instead seeing it in terms of a problem in ideas. By the start of the First World War, the Social Democrats had become so corrupted by its activities in bourgeois institutions it supported its state (and ruling class) and voted for war credits rather than denounce the war as Imperialist

slaughter for profits. After the war, the Social Democrats crushed the German revolution, organising the far right "free corps" who not only murdered Luxemburg but also laid the basis of the Nazi movement.

Given that *Imagine* fails to learn from this sorry tale, it comes as not surprise that it does not present any coherent explanation of why Labourism failed. This is understandable, as chronicling the watering down of radical politics by electioneering would undermine their own strategy. As such, we are informed that "although Labour was a socialist party in words, it was, in practice a social democratic party" (and not even that as they "were not even genuine social democrats" as they tolerated the House of Lords and other feudal institutions). Does this mean that the *ideas* of Labour were the problem? The message seems to be one of simply creating a new party with radical ideas and we can achieve socialism by the same methods of electioneering. Needless to say, there is no mention of the degeneration of the German Green Party into reformism in the 1980s after its success at the ballot box thrust it into mainstream politics.

This does not mean that Sheridan and McCombe are unaware that institutional pressures determine policies. As can be seen from their discussion on social democratic parties being some of "the most rabidly Thatcherite governments," when they note the "powerful forces shaping these" parties into right-wing ones. (p. 119 and p. 115) Why the SSP will be immune to these "changes in the global capitalist economy" is not explained. Perhaps it is simply because, well, it has the right ideas?

The fate of social democracy, incidentally, proved Bakunin was right on the issue of electioneering. He predicted that the use of electioneering would water down socialist policies and turn parties reformist. It was for this reason he urged direct action based on workers' self-organisation. So when *Imagine* states that "electing dedicated socialist politicians . . . is an important part of the battle to change society. It is not enough" (p. 154) anarchists argue that such tactics have a proven record of de-radicalising the parties involved. Moreover, they

also undermine constructive activity in our workplaces and communities and the building organs of working class power which can create a dual power to that of the state and capital.

Perhaps this focus on the ballot box explains the poverty of *Imagine's* vision of socialism? Isolated individuals putting crosses in a bit of paper do not create new class organisations by which they can manage society. Constructive socialist activity and organising can only exist, by definition, outside the ballot box. By focusing on the ballot box, the idea that socialism can only be created from below, based on the organisations working class people create in their struggle against capitalism is missing. Rather than community assemblies, we get revamped "community councils." Rather than workers' self-management, we get workers' control. Rather than working class power, we get a socialist

**"a dense network" of self-managed
working class organs is what
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considered as its result.**

government.

Counter-revolution

Being self-proclaimed revolutionaries, we should expect some discussion of the dangers of counter-revolution. However, *Imagine* essentially dismisses the idea that we have anything to worry about.

As regards economic pressure, they argue that while "money can be shuffled around from one country to another . . . an entire financial system employing 100,000 skilled and trained workers cannot just be dismantled and moved abroad." (p. 197) But it does not have to be. A capital strike or flight would do the job quite effectively without having to worry about dismantling anything. The workers in this sector, without money, have nothing to do and would be made redundant. Controls of capital movements can be escaped from and pressure applied by international markets. Ironically, Sheridan and McCombe point out that the state planned coups against Labour Governments and that pressure from the IMF and big business ensured that Labour did what it was told in the 1960s and 70s (p. 64) yet this becomes

irrelevant when discussing a SSP government!

This is also the case for military invasion as well as a military coup. They point to the example of Chile, arguing that it was "an island of democracy surrounded by military dictatorship" and so we need not fear a such a fate in Scotland. (pp. 147-8) It would be churlish to note that Chile was such an "island" simply because its neighbours had seen, like Chile, elected reformist governments overthrown by military coups!

However, this does not stop them raising the possibility that the ruling class may not fight fair. They acknowledge that "Chilean big business" had "brought the country to a state of chaos" and "prepared" the ground for the military junta. However, they argue that a "future socialist government in Scotland could cut across the threat of reaction by

building and sustaining mass popular support at home and abroad" by "very swiftly taking full control over the direction of the economy to prevent disruption and destabilisation by big business" and "creating a dense network of

democratic committees in every community, every workplace, every university, to involve hundreds of thousands of people in the task of transforming society." (pp. 148-9) Ignoring the slight contradiction with their claims that some big business would remain untouched under the "socialist" government (indeed, it would still make a profit!) and that society would be run from the bottom up rather than from the top-down (which is what the government taking "full control over the direction of the economy" means), their arguments are less than convincing.

The mass support of the Spanish population for the Republic did not stop Franco in 1936. Indeed, it was only the existence of the anti-parliamentarian CNT which had already organised a dense network of union assemblies which ensured that the coup was defeated in two-thirds of the country. Waiting for the "future socialist government" to create such a network will ensure the victory of any attempted coup. Equally, unless workers were prepared to act for themselves to expropriate capital and place it under

***Imagine* therefore achieves the impossible. It unites Lenin and Lennon — by making both spin in their graves!**

workers' self-management, the economy would grind to a halt while people waited for the politicians to do anything constructive (assuming they knew anything about the economy, never mind work, in the first place). Simply put, "a dense network" of self-managed working class organs is what required to create a revolution in the first place and cannot be considered as its result.

For anarchists, we must create this "dense network" now by organising outside and against parliament and using direct action and solidarity to win reforms under capitalism. That this strategy is the best can be seen from history. While in Germany Hitler took power with little or no opposition, in Italy and Spain the fascists had to fight long and hard to gain power. This was due to the influence of the anarchists who encouraged working class people to look to their own power and organisation to affect change rather than vote for leaders to act for them. If they had waited for a "socialist government" to act for them, then Mussolini and Franco would have taken power as easily as Hitler did.

In conclusion

Sheridan and McCombes end by asking "What side are you on?" and present the duality of "Capitalism or socialism?" Looking at this book, the obvious answer must be "**Neither.**"

defending (regardless of what Lenin or Marx said!). Goldman saw in Russia the confirmation of these ideas and, as important, the anarchist case against using the top-down and centralising state as a means of solving the problems facing a revolution. Her illusions in Bolshevism were destroyed by exposure to its realities, but her anarchism was confirmed and enriched.

Goldman intellectual journey is useful in countering modern Leninists. Ultimately, to excuse, as they do, Bolshevik authoritarianism on what revolutionaries are meant to consider as the inevitable results of a revolution (civil war, "exceptional circumstances," etc.) seems, well, less than convincing. Goldman's book provides a useful antidote to that kind of nonsense. She summarises the lessons she drew from her experiences, reaffirming the need for revolution, the importance of workers' self-activity and self-organisation (called by her anarcho-syndicalism) and the importance of unmasking the great delusion of Bolshevism which, if applied elsewhere, would result in the

Anarchists remember what socialism is meant to be about, namely the abolition of the wages system. We know that the state must be abolished if we truly want a genuine "grassroots democracy." We recognise that social democratic tactics result in reformist ends and that electioneering destroys constructive Socialist activity in our workplaces and communities. Rather than building self-managed organs of working class power, it undermines working class self-help, self-organisation and self-activity by spreading the delusion that salvation comes from above.

As such, the only real choice is this: Libertarian Communism or some form of capitalism. While Sheridan and McCombes are right to argue that "*one thing that differentiates conscious socialism from militant trade unionism, or from radical environmentalism, is that we have a clear goal . . . we also need vision.*" (pp. 158-9) the vision they present is only a benign version of capitalism. We can do so much better!

same failures as in Russia.

Her book is therefore highly recommended, particularly as her analyses have been confirmed by modern research. For example, rather than being wishful thinking, Goldman's argument that the Russian workers were capable of taking control of their revolution has support in research into working class collective struggle under Lenin. Her account of the Kronstadt revolt has been confirmed by modern historians. Bolshevik authoritarianism has been shown to have started long before the civil war started. They were, for example, gerrymandering soviets and disbanding any with elected non-Bolshevik majorities in the spring of 1918 (Goldman: "*once in control of the Government the Communists saw that the soviets threatened the supremacy of the State*"). Lenin's policies of "one-man management" and state capitalism date from pre-civil war times. All this is well known, at least outside of Leninist circles. There the civil war explains all, regardless of the facts. There were alternatives to Bolshevik policies and

In summary, *Imagine* is a step forward in the sense that the imagery it involves is libertarian sounding. It is no coincidence that they dwell more on the Spanish Revolution than the Russian. The highly centralised, party run, top-down Leninist scheme inspires few these days. However, it is definitely two steps backward. Firstly, because its libertarian rhetoric hides a statist and capitalist core. As such, the break with Leninism is more apparent than real. They may want to "imagine" a socialist society, but they fail. Secondly, for *Imagine* socialism comes about via the ballot box. As such, this is a retreat from Lenin back to Marx at his worse. It forgets the last 130 years and resurrects social democracy in its original form. The idea that the current state has to be smashed is simply missing, as is the idea that the framework of the socialist society is created from the combat organisations of the working class forged in the class struggle.

Imagine therefore achieves the impossible. It unites Lenin and Lennon — by making both spin in their graves!

the social forces to implement them. She has been proved right when she noted that what the Bolsheviks called the "defence of the Revolution" was "really only the defence of [their] party in power."

Goldman simply stated the obvious by writing the Russian Revolution was "a failure." She quoted Kropotkin as saying the Bolsheviks showed "how Revolutions must **not** be made." If the revolution had been made "*à la Bakunin instead of à la Marx*," she was sure the "results would have been different and more satisfactory." As she stressed, the means determine the ends. Hopefully more radicals are becoming aware of these obvious facts. The reprinting of Kropotkin's and Goldman's books will undoubtedly aid that process. Studying them, learning from them and, most importantly, developing their insights and theories will ensure modern revolutionaries make history rather than repeat it. They show how a revolution **should** be made. No greater praise is required or necessary.

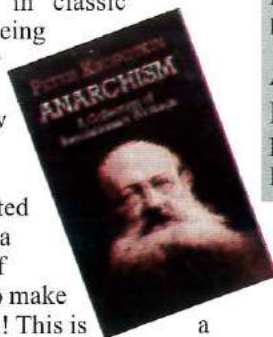
"How Revolutions must not be made"

— and the alternative

As in the 1960s, the upsurge in anarchist activism has resulted in a similar upsurge in classic anarchist titles being produced by mainstream publishers. A new generation of radicals are becoming interested in anarchism and a new generation of capitalists want to make money from them! This is a positive side-effect of the prominence we have achieved in the news reporting of the anti-capitalist movement. Hopefully these new radicals will take the opportunity to learn from some old ones, particularly as these books are so good.

After a few decades of being out of print, Emma Goldman's classic account of her experiences in Lenin's Russia has been reprinted. In addition, a valuable collection of essays by the anarchist formerly known as Prince has been reprinted. Formerly known as "Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets" it has been renamed simply "Anarchism." For those unfamiliar with Kropotkin's work it is simply indispensable reading. Containing such classics as (an abridged) "Modern Science and Anarchism," "The Spirit of Revolt," "Revolutionary Government," "Anarchist Morality" and "An Appeal to the Young" a better collection of works in one volume is impossible to find. For those interested in communist-anarchism, this is the place to start.

Of particular interest in the light of the Goldman reprint are Kropotkin's comments on the Russian Revolution. The book includes Kropotkin's "Letter to the Workers of Western Europe" and a post-1917 post-script to his essay "Anarchist-Communism." He reiterates the key idea of anarchism, that a revolution will only succeed if the working masses, through their own organisations, organise their own affairs directly as the only means of achieving socialism and freedom. As he put it, "we are learning in Russia how not to introduce communism." The essays in this book indicate the only



My Disillusionment in Russia

Emma Goldman, Dover Publications, ISBN: 0-486-43270-X

Anarchism: A Collection of Revolutionary Writings

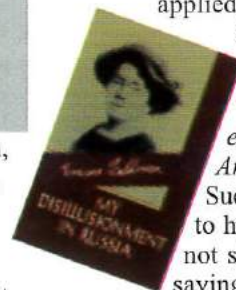
Peter Kropotkin, Dover Publications, ISBN 0-486-41955-X

revolutionary alternative to Bolshevism, anarchism. Only revolution from below, by the working masses using direct action and creating their own popular organisations of self-management, could create a free society, "Communist organisation," as Kropotkin argued years before the Bolsheviks proved it, "cannot be left to be constructed by legislative bodies called parliaments, municipal or communal council. It must be the work of all, a natural growth, a product of the constructive genius of the great mass. Communism cannot be imposed from above; it could not live even for a few months if the constant and daily co-operation of all did not uphold it. It must be free."

"the truth of the matter is that the Russian people have been locked out and that the Bolshevik State . . . uses the sword and the gun to keep the people out . . . Just because I am a revolutionist I refuse to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party." Emma Goldman

Goldman's book is a different, but equally important, work. The leading anarchist in America at the time, she recounts the experiences which forced her to reconsider her support for the Bolsheviks and which led to her final break with Lenin's regime. Like many anarchists outside Russia in 1917, Goldman had defended the Bolshevik revolution wholeheartedly. Deported alongside Alexander Berkman from the US in December 1919 as being a dangerous subversive she arrived in revolutionary Russia the following month. Willing to put aside their anti-state principles, she and Berkman hoped for the best of that oxymoron, "revolutionary" government. What they discovered soon made them reaffirm their anti-statism in the face of Bolshevik party dictatorship and bureaucracy. In the workplaces, they discovered that the workers had new bosses. In the prisons, they discovered that radicals had new guards. In society as a whole, they discovered that the

autocracy of the Tsar had been replaced by the autocracy of the Bolshevik Central Committee (it took slightly longer for one-man management to be applied there than in the factories!).



Goldman had not "come to Russia expecting to find Anarchism realised." Such idealism was alien to her (although that has not stopped Leninists saying the opposite).

Rather, she expected to see "the beginnings of the social changes for which the Revolution had been fought." She was aware that revolutions were difficult, involving "destruction" and "violence." That Russia was not perfect was not the source of her opposition to Bolshevism. Rather, it was the fact that "the Russian people have been locked out" of their own revolution and that the Bolshevik state used "the sword and the gun to keep the people out." As a

revolutionary she refused "to side with the master class, which in Russia is called the Communist Party."

Her break with Bolshevism took time.

She, like Berkman, repeated the rationalisations that modern Leninists repeat to this day. She justified Bolshevik authoritarianism in terms of the blockade by the imperialist powers, in terms of the civil war, in terms of the economic collapse these events caused. It took the crushing of the Kronstadt rebellion in March 1921 to finally convince them that these "objective" factors simply could not explain what had happened to the revolution. The civil war had ended, but Bolshevik authoritarianism and state capitalism remained. She could no longer blind herself to the obvious.

Goldman's opposition to Bolshevism flowed from her politics. Rather than refute her anarchism, the Russian Revolution confirmed it. Anarchists had long argued that a revolution would provoke economic disruption, unemployment, etc. (see Kropotkin's "Conquest of Bread"). Similarly, anarchists have never been so stupid to think a revolution does not need